

Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

DEADLY LIMITS AND UNLIMITED RESURRECTION

Luke 20:27-38

Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 27)

Analysis by Cathy Lessmann

27Some Sadducees, those who say there is no resurrection, came to him 28and asked him a question. "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies, leaving a wife but no children, the man shall marry the widow and raise up children for his brother. 29Now there were seven brothers; the first married, and died childless; 30then the second 31and the third married her, and so in the same way all seven died childless. 32In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had married her." 34Jesus said to them, "Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage; 35but those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. 36Indeed they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection. 37And the fact that the dead are raised Moses himself showed, in the story about the bush, where he speaks of the Lord as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. 38Now he is God not of the dead but of the living; for to him all of them are alive."

DIAGNOSIS: The Limits of the Old Age

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Stressing Limits*

The Sadducees' all-consuming interest was strict adherence to the Pentateuch which made them zealous preservers of the status quo. They wanted nothing to do with new-fangled ideas like resurrection; they'd rather focus on the limits that God places on society now. When they ask Jesus their trick question about marriage and resurrection (vv. 27-33), they really don't give a whit about either; they care only about the laws (the limitations) that regulate them. How sad that their all-consuming absorption with limitations ends up limiting them to a bleak, cheerless interpretation of life. Are we any different when we focus, and maybe insist, on the limitations we experience in life?

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis : *Limiting Jesus*

Jesus clearly understands that the Sadducees' ulterior motive is to discredit him so as to give them legitimate grounds for handing him over to the authorities (v. 20). The hope of the New Age he has been proclaiming is just too threatening to their restricted worldview; it offers possibilities they aren't willing to accept. That New Age might end up discrediting THEM, so they HAVE to discredit (limit) him first.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis : *Limiters Eliminated*

Ironically and tragically, the limiters get their way! Their crusade to slam shut the door on any possibility of resurrection succeeds—specifically on them. Worse, on the other side of the door, God slams the door even harder! Jesus anticipates this divine rejection (and corrects their false assumption that all people will be raised from the dead) by declaring that resurrection is only for “those who are considered worthy” (v. 34). In the parable he had told earlier (of the tenants who kill the owner's son), he clarified that “worthiness” involves

receiving him, the “beloved son” (v. 13).

PROGNOSIS: The Limitlessness of the New Age

Step 4: Initial Prognosis : *The Resurrection that Includes*

Many times Jesus had explained that he did not come to slam doors, especially the door to the New Age, but to usher it in, to open it—even for those intent on rejecting him. One striking feature of this New Age is that old limitations, such as death, are abrogated, nullified. This Age begins when the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the “God of the living” (v. 38), is not limited by Jesus’ elimination, his death, but returns him to life. As the angels said to the terrified women standing at his empty tomb, “Why...look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen” (Luke 24:5).

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis : *The Hope of the Resurrection*

Incredibly, Jesus promises that his resurrection will be shared with all “the worthy,” namely, those who attach themselves to him. He is “the firstborn from the dead” (Col. 1:18) and those who embrace him become his siblings, “children of God” and consequently equally “children of resurrection” (v. 36). This hope of the New Age replaces the dreary hopelessness of “limited living.”

Step 6: Final Prognosis : *Living with Hope*

Jesus did not intend his assertion about marriage in the resurrection to deflate the institution to second rate. Rather, it was simply a clarification that while the institutions of “this age” hold an important place, they do not ultimately define us: marriage may be a way for mortals to enter life and be embraced by it, but it does not have the final word about us. The gateway into the New Age is resurrection—which cannot be limited by human relationships (v. 34-35). How marvelous, then, that our New Age hope in Christ transforms life-as-usual (even marriage-as-usual) into a gift worthy of our attention and care

in the here-and-now.