
25TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

NOVEMBER 10, 2013

A MIRACLE WAITING TO HAPPEN

Pastor Jim Dunn

Luke 20:27-40

Sadducees Ask About the Resurrection

27 There came to him some Sadducees, those who deny that there is a resurrection, **28** and they asked him a question, saying, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies, having a wife but no children, the man must take the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. **29** Now there were seven brothers. The first took a wife, and died without children. **30** And the second **31** and the third took her, and likewise all seven left no children and died. **32** Afterward the woman also died. **33** In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had her as wife." **34** And Jesus said to them, "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, **35** but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage, **36** for they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection. **37** But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the bush, where he calls the Lord the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. **38** Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him." **39** Then some of the scribes answered, "Teacher, you have spoken well." **40** For they no longer dared to ask him any question.

"There came to Jesus some Sadducees, those who deny that there is a resurrection..."

A well known evangelist tells a story about a family vacation to Philadelphia. He and his family were going on a tour of one of our historical treasures. On the tour they found themselves walking behind a family from New York. The evangelist says that no one told him they were from New York. They didn't have to. He could tell.

Their teenage son had half of his head shaved. On the other half of his head, his hair hung down past his shoulder. The daughter looked like she couldn't make up her mind that morning what to wear. She was wearing three or four different sets of clothes at the same time. The way the mother was dressed looked like she'd raided her daughter's closet. The dad's hair hung down to his waist. The evangelist says he had them all figured out. The kids were probably on drugs. The parents were going through a midlife crisis. All of them were in serious need of spiritual counsel.

He had them all figured out until they introduced themselves and told him how excited they were to meet him. "We can't believe we're actually meeting you!" they said. "We've read your books in our Sunday School class at our church. When you were speaking in our area we wanted to get over to hear you, but that was our family night." Sunday School? Church? Family night? Boy, had he made a mistake! He had labeled them.

We all use labels. We put them on jars of fruit or vegetables that we have canned. We put labels on manila file folders. We put labels on the electronic files in our hard drive. We even put labels on ourselves: Christians, Jews, Muslims, Lutherans, Episcopalians, Baptists, Americans, Canadians, and Brits.

Folks in Jesus' day did the same thing. So, there were Romans, Greeks, and Jews. Among the Jews, there were more labels, Pharisees, Essenes, Zealots, and Sadducees, because each label represented beliefs that were a little different. For instance, the Sadducees accepted only the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. And, as Luke put it, they denied that there will be a resurrection.

Well, if they wanted to label themselves as Sadducees, that's okay. Labeling others? Now, that's a different matter. The Pharisees had tried to hang a label on Jesus – Crackpot, False Prophet, Samaritan, Demon-possessed.

Now it was the Sadducees' turn. They apparently wanted to label Jesus a theological lightweight, an amateur, a Messiah wannabe. These resurrection deniers sprang on Jesus a ridiculous question about the resurrection that they no doubt had used before on others. If a woman was married to seven brothers in succession, and each one of the brothers died, which one will be her husband in the resurrection?

Their ridiculous question showed not only a disregard for the resurrection and a disrespect of Jesus. Did they not consider that in the crowd that day there may have been someone who just lost a brother or who just lost a husband? Did it not occur to them that maybe someone came to hear Jesus that very day because he sought comfort for real grief? The Sadducees simply did not see the woman and the seven brothers in their story as potentially real people with faces and names and real hurts and sorrows.

That's where labeling people leads. It prevents us from seeing people as individuals, each with his own hurts and joys, each with her own successes and disappointments. Labeling people prevents us from seeing how much other folks are just like us. Of course, it is easier to emphasize our differences. It is easier to label someone than it is to pray with him. It is easier to fear than to love. It is easier to condemn than it is to extend the hand of welcome. It is easier to judge than it is to get to know a person. Most of all, putting labels on others makes us feel superior to them, makes us feel righteous. John tells us of a time when he and the other disciples tried to hang a label on a man born blind. The disciples wanted to put on him a label that said "Dirty Rotten Sinner." But it could have been the label of any group we hate or fear or think of as being beneath us. They asked Jesus regarding this man, "Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

How did Jesus respond? Did Jesus see this man born blind as an opportunity to debate or to label or to condemn? No, He saw this blind man as an opportunity for God to work a miracle. "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," Jesus said, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life." Jesus called him a miracle waiting to happen. Folks may label a person a dirty rotten so-and- so. You fill in the blank. But Jesus might call him or her a miracle waiting to happen.

So, what has Jesus called you? At some point, others have labeled you with labels you did not appreciate. At some point, you have been the topic of conversation in the living room while you were in the kitchen. At one point or another, you have been left on the outside looking in.

Jesus does not look at you though as a label or as just a topic for debate or conversation. Jesus associates you with a face and a name. "I have summoned you by name," He says, "you are mine." (Isaiah 43:1) And Revelation talks about our names being written in the Book of Life. (Revelation 21) To Jesus who died and rose for you, you are so much more than the labels you wear or that people put on you. Who is it that knows all of the joys and the hurts that you have known? Who is it that knows all of the successes and disappointments that you have experienced? Who doesn't just lump you in with some group or have your information in the same file as a bunch of other people or treat you as just one more in the crowd? Who as your Shepherd knows you as His sheep by name and calls you by that name? Who did not judge you or condemn you or reject you or shame you? Who?

The One who instead died for you and rose again so that in spite of what the Sadducees believed about the resurrection, one day there will be a resurrection of the dead and you too will rise from the dead, so that you too are a miracle waiting to happen! On the Last Day, you will rise from the dead. So Jesus also calls you a miracle waiting to happen.

Jesus has brought you from being on the outside looking in to being on the inside, to being in on the work that God is doing. Being on the inside of the work of God that was displayed in the life of the man who was born blind. Also, the work of God of which Jesus spoke right before He gave that blind man his sight. The work of God of which Jesus said, "As long as it is day, we must do the work of Him who sent Me."

What is that work we must do, that we get to do? Welcoming others instead of rejecting, caring instead of condemning, forgiving instead of accusing, accepting instead of shaming, loving instead of fearing.

All for the chance to give sight to the blind. All for the chance to tell the spiritually blind how Jesus died and rose for them, to offer them the promise, of a miracle waiting to happen, that they too can be buried with Christ in Baptism, their sins drowned, and raised with Him to newness of life, and raised by Him on the Last Day at the resurrection of the dead to be with Him in that perfectly and permanently restored community, the new earth.

Amen.