

Luke 20:27-38

The One Relationship That Will Never Change

On Friday, school took a field trip. Towards the end of the tour at the Detroit Parade Company, I was pushing a grumpy and tired Lydia in her stroller. She was clinging to her favorite stuffed animal. One of the other parents was walking next to me and said, “Aw, that’s so cute! Is that her favorite? Does she sleep with it?” And then after I answered she said, “I miss those days. It all goes by so fast!” As parents of young children, we keep hearing that refrain echoed over and over. It goes so fast.

That’s a really hard part of life...coping with the fact that every single relationship eventually changes. Children go from completely dependant on you as parents to wanting their space. They go from happy to spend all their time with you to wanting less and less to do with you. Eventually they move on to high school and college. They get their own apartments and jobs. They get married and start their own families. Yes, they’re your kids, but it changes.

This is not unique to the child-parent relationship either. There are people out there whom in grade school or high school I was such good friends with that I would have never thought our relationship would change. And yet, without fault to anyone, time and distance and differing life paths caused us to drift apart. I haven’t talked to them in years. Most of you who are adults can probably recount at least one person you thought you’d spend your life with in marriage...someone you were closer to that anyone else in the world at the time...and for whatever reason it didn’t work out and they aren’t even a cursory part of your life now. And even when it comes to the highest relationship in this life, marriage, that too doesn’t last. Some are torn apart by sin. Others are torn apart by death. Some of you here today have experienced that pain.

It’s a really hard part of life...coping with the fact that every single earthly relationship eventually changes.

And so this morning on Saints Triumphant, let’s take comfort from Jesus’ words. As he faced a challenge questioning the very center of all our hope...the resurrection from the dead...he assures us that our hope is not misplaced and in doing so offers us the comfort of knowing that there IS one relationship...the most important, most meaningful, and most desired relationship...there is one relationship that will never change. On this day of celebration, Saints Triumphant, on this day of celebrating the victory our Savior has given to his believers who have followed him into death and back into life, let’s think about those comforting truths from the gospel of Luke 20.

The challenge Jesus received came from a group called the Sadducees. The Sadducees were a politically minded group. More concerned with worldly power than faithfulness to God’s Word. They were happy to compromise with secular and

pagan leaders if it meant they could have control. At Jesus' time, they were the group who held the majority of the seats in the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling body. In just three days, many of them would be casting their votes to condemn Jesus and send him to Pilate to ask for his death.

As Luke notes for us in our reading, one of the distinct teachings of the Sadducees was denial of the resurrection. Like many modern day Jews denied a personal, bodily resurrection. If there's anything after this life, they say, it sort of a collective reabsorbing in the one essence of God.

Now, I don't know if the chicken or the egg came first when it comes to the Sadducees. Did they deny the resurrection BECAUSE they wanted a defense for their desire to focus so much on the here and now? Or did they focus so much on the here and now BECAUSE they didn't believe there was anything to concern themselves with after this life? I don't know, but the two are undeniably related.

As Jesus was teaching in the temple courts on Tuesday of Holy Week, the Sadducees saw a perfect opportunity to challenge Jesus' authority and wisdom. They thought they had found the perfect example from God's own Word that would prove just how absurd the idea of a personal, bodily resurrection was.

And it went like this. In the Mosaic law, given to the Israelites from God through Moses on Mt. Sinai, God had made provisions for the prosperity of families in the face of tragedy or other factors. You see, possessions, particularly possession of land, was tied together with family lines and inheritances that went through the sons, the male children. So God had commanded that if a husband died and left his wife childless, his brother was supposed to marry the widow and the children they had together were to be considered the children of the dead brother. In this way, the family line and the inheritance could be preserved. The Sadducees posed this hypothetical to Jesus. Suppose this very situation happens. But each time the widow is remarried, no children are born. And this happens with seven brothers, in succession. All eight of them died, the seven brothers, one after the other, and finally the wife. Jesus, if there's actually a resurrection, who's she going to be married to? Figure THAT one out!

I'm sure they thought they were being very clever! See, Jesus, the fact that God himself would ask someone to enter 7 times into that sacred, intimate bond of marriage shows conclusively that he must not have had anything in mind for after this life! I mean how could he put those 7 brothers and that wife into such a difficult situation?! I'm sure they thought they were being very clever.

But Jesus had an answer that showed them their here-and-now focus on life in this world was blinding them from seeing the truth. ³⁴**Jesus said to them, "The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. ³⁵But those who are considered worthy to experience that age and the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage.**

Jesus said everything will be different in the life to come.

Does that make you a little bit sad? Wait, I won't think of my husband as my husband? I won't think of grandma and grandpa as grandma and grandpa? I won't have the same relationship with my kids?

If those words of Jesus make you a little sad, then I think you might need the reminder of the danger of clinging to this life...the danger of making THIS LIFE the height of your desire. Because what happens is you start to destroy your joy and desire for the life to come.

I was reading the twitter feed of a father who has become mildly famous for reporting the funny interactions he has with his three young daughters. One went like this. His 5 year old daughter said, "Dad, I don't want to go to church." Dad said, "Why not, don't you want to go to heaven?" Daughter responded, "Not if its like church." Now you might laugh, but think about that for a second because I think it's the same as being sad at Jesus saying our relationships will be different in heaven. Both are focusing on this life and conceiving of heaven in those terms. Are we really going to sit around the throne of God and sing hymns for eternity? For some that sounds like a joy, but for others of you it probably sounds like a special kind of torture!

Here's the thing, if we spend all our time clinging to this life...if we think that our relationships as a son, daughter, father, mother, husband, wife, friend are what defines us and without them life can't be everything we want it to be, then of course you're going to be disappointed with Jesus' words...of course you're going to think of the life in terms of what has been lost. Because you've believed the lie of Satan and you've found your value and your meaning in something other than God.

And you know what? For such short-sighted, earthly minded thoughts that we could ever even approach disappointment in conceiving of the glories he has prepared for us, he should cast us from his presence forever.

But did you notice what Jesus said? **Those who are considered worthy to experience that age and the resurrection from the dead.** Are you worthy? Yes you are. Not of your own accord. But you are worthy because you have been made worthy. As John wrote in Revelation when he saw that great throng of believers who will stand in the resurrection, **his bride has made herself ready, and she was given bright, clean, fine linen to wear. (In fact, the fine linen is the "not guilty" verdicts pronounced on the saints).** You have been robed in a sin-free gown of God's own making. Spun for you from the fibers of Jesus' own righteousness and washed in the blood of his death on the cross. That not only makes you worthy of that age, but makes you fit to continue that one relationship that will never change...a marriage that will last for eternity...our marriage to God lived in everlasting joy. **They are sons of God, because they are sons of the resurrection.**

Because of Jesus, you are a forgiven child of God and his beautiful, sin-free bride. Your Lord has done everything to make sure you've been brought into that relationship, will stay in the relationship and get to enjoy that relationship even beyond death. For on that great last day, he will raise up your body and reunite it with your soul to be with him forever. There is one relationship that will never change.

So what do we do here and now while we wait. Can I suggest a couple of things?

Let's view take what Jesus says here and use it to put our relationships in the proper perspective. We're not going to lose anything in the life to come. Here's what I mean. I suppose there is a time in every boy's life when they can't possibly conceive of loving any woman more than they love their mother. That is until they meet their future wife. I suppose we have a hard time conceiving of a life that center around those who are closest to us. But we don't have to understand Jesus' words to mean that we'll lose those who closest to us. Rather, we will gain so many more. We will be in an eternal fellowship with all believers as close to each and as beloved as even your husband and wife. We'll share that with fathers and mothers and husbands and wives from this life...and you'll share it with everyone else too.

Let's also look forward to that day as we remember our loved ones who have gone to that joy and celebrate their victory.

And let's finally strive to cling to that one relationship that will never change. Let's spend our days wrapping our minds and hearts around the love our heavenly bridegroom has had for us and long for the day when we will be united with him for all eternity.

For all those saints of God who have gone before us, we rejoice this day and long to experience in all its glorious fullness that one relationship that will never change...a life with our God before his throne...children of the resurrection, bride of Christ, sons of God. Amen.