

C All Saints 11.6.22

Luke 20:27-38

Focus Statement: We live in God.

It's All Saints Sunday, why the weird story about marriage? First off, let me tell you that while this is the assigned lectionary text for today, this is not the assigned lectionary text for All Saints Day. All Saints Day, which was technically Monday, but we generally observe on the first Sunday after the actual day, has the beatitudes from Luke as it's assigned Gospel reading. But I was talking to the lectionary study group I meet with and my friend Mark mentioned he was going with this text for today, because of the last line, "God is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive." And I thought, that's a great line, I think I'll follow Mark's lead. And then this week I was listening to the lectionary podcast I listen to out of Luther Seminary, and they discussed how these texts might be the hardest in all three years of the lectionary. So, I guess we're about to see who's correct, my friend Mark or three scholars from Luther, but anyway. Before we get into that particular verse and why I like it and really this whole passage so much for All Saints Day let's do some context setting, because the marriage piece is, I'll give you, weird.

The passage starts out introducing us to "some Sadducees," and this next part is a clue to what the point of this passage is, "those who say there is no resurrection, came to [Jesus] and asked him a question." If a woman marries seven brothers, all of whom die, who's wife will she be in the resurrection? Here's the background to this question, because remember, the law this is referencing comes from a very different time. In ancient times, if a man died, his inheritance would not go to his wife, it would go to his children. And if he didn't have children, it would go to his siblings or some other close relation, leaving the widow

destitute. To solve this problem and protect the widow, the Jewish law includes this requirement that if a man were to die childless, his brother would have the responsibility to father an heir for his dead brother with the dead brother's wife. That heir would be considered the child of the dead man, not the child of the biological father, and would then give the widow access to the support of her husband's estate. So yes, to our modern ears, it's super weird to think about having to father a child with your dead brother's wife, but the point is, this was a law about protecting widows and making sure they still had access to resources after their husbands died. We marry for very different reasons today, so this doesn't fit our society, but for the ancient near east, this was a good law meant to provide for the vulnerable after their support systems had died.

But the Sadducees weren't concerned about the safety of widows. Instead, their question was about, won't it be awkward in heaven when this woman is married to seven brothers. The problem with the Sadducees question is, well, there are a lot of problems with the Sadducees question. One problem is asking, "whose wife is this?" keeps the widow as a piece of property, her value connected to that of her husband, rather than as a child of God in her own right, deserving of being valued and honored and protected. But probably the biggest mistake in this question is it misses the essence of resurrected life. Resurrected life isn't like the life the Sadducees lived in, where women were property, and people were undervalued. It isn't like the life we live in, where economic inequality is raging and the planet is treated as a consumable resource and truth is in the eye of the teller. Resurrected life is an entirely different kind of life, one where all people are valued because they are children of God, where all of God's creation is held in care, where there is abundance

because everyone has enough, not more than they need, but enough. Resurrected life is a life based not on where you fit in the rules; resurrected life is a life based on relationships. The relationship God has with us through Jesus and, and through the love we've experienced in God, the relationships we have with each other.

That, dear people of God, is what makes this such a great text for All Saints Day. Because this is a text about the endurance of relationships, and relationships do not die even when we do. Because God is a God of resurrection, because ours is a God who conquered death, we know that the people who loved us, who we loved, and who's lives changed us in so many ways, those relationships continue to live on in us. In how we have been changed and shaped and molded by them.

What we celebrate on All Saints Day is not only that the people we loved lived, but that they still live on in us. God is a God of the living not of the dead, because the dead are never truly gone, the impact they had on the world still lives in how it shapes us. I never met Don Pope, he had passed away before I was called here, but Eileen and I had a conversation about him on Thursday while I was drafting this sermon, about some best practices we have around the building that he helped to start. Every single thing in this sanctuary is entirely mobile, and we are still anchored in Post Addition, because the saints who have gone on before us believed in the mission of this place and were incredibly forward thinking about what worship could look like. A handful of you were here when those decisions were made, but this is a fifty-year-old building, none of you were in major

leadership roles when those decisions were made. We stand on the shoulders, we do ministry on the shoulders, of those who came before us.

That's not to say that these blessed saints were perfect. What makes someone a saint is their relationship to God, not their status as perfect humans. This incredibly forward-thinking liturgical space also reminds us of that. This is an amazing, gorgeous, flexible space, with perfect acoustics, and a forty-foot-tall ceiling with heating vents ten feet off the floor and with a lot of unnecessary corners for that heat to travel around. Our ancestors in faith thought about worship mobility and accessibility, but it was the late sixties, gas prices weren't on their priority list. And we learn from that too. Every time I see Don Herdman's type-written instructions on which fans are broken, I remember the legacy of a ministry that has always put mission ahead of its own comfort, prioritizing love of neighbor over their own convenience. I wish I had Don's handyman skills, but that culture of caring that Don displayed in his do-it-himself spirit predated Don even, and it lives on in all of you.

I've named dropped some ancestors of this congregation, people some of you are familiar with and others not, but all of us have our own stories like these. Stories of people who taught us lessons about caring for others, working for justice, making do with less so that others could have enough. On All Saints Day we give thanks for those people, for how they shaped us and for how, through us, they continue to shape the world.

All of this is possible, dear people, because ours is a God who conquered death. Who in dying destroyed the separation between death and life, so that death may never have the

last work. We live, our loved ones live, because God lives. And because God lives, we can share God's love with everyone. Thanks be to God. Amen.