

Sunday between 6th and 12th November [32]

Luke 20:27-40

What a difficult Gospel reading we have just heard. It seems at first glance to be very deep and theological and in many ways pretty unimportant to us today.

The premise of the question was for the Sadducees who believed only in the 5 books of the Torah, the first 5 books of our old testament, and rejected other interpretations of Jewish law and tradition, for them to catch out Jesus and the Pharisees with whom they disagreed about these matters of faith. They were trying to get 2 birds with one stone and make Jesus falter while making the Pharisees look stupid. Perhaps they thought that whatever answer Jesus gave they would look good compared with either Jesus or their old enemy, the Pharisees.

The Sadducees did not believe in resurrection after death in contrast with the Pharisees and indeed in contradiction to our own Christian statement of faith. What they would have liked Jesus to have done was either to agree with them and show up their enemies or side with the Pharisees and be shown up himself with the stupidity of the argument in their example. That of a woman, married multiple times, with no child to connect her to one husband over any of the others, who then would she be married to at the resurrection?

We could say, all of them but that seems immoral, none of them, but that is in contradiction to the writings of the Torah, or we could conclude that there is no resurrection so the question is irrelevant. And yet, Jesus has another answer, one that supports neither side, nor condemns either side, but rather offers a different interpretation of scripture altogether.

Jesus, in his special relationship with the father and the understanding he brought to the world, knew that in fact none of these scenarios were the answer to the question posed. He knew that the resurrection was not of the body, where we live in heaven as carbon copies of the people we were on earth, but rather it was something else, something none of us can truly understand but something we trust to be better than what we now know.

That was the answer that silenced a room! And to put it in context, in the preceding verses of this part of the gospel we hear of the Pharisees asking Jesus their question about paying taxes, where once again Jesus had the answer no one expected, render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's. Our Lord was having a rough day there, but his wits were sharp and his answers unquestionable. And he could best his audience because he has a fuller picture than we do, he knows more than us, he sees where human life fits into spiritual existence, he knows what we cannot yet know.

And because we cannot know we are constantly interpreting scripture in our own lives, and stages of life. One passage may speak differently to us now than it did 10 years ago because we have changed; we have experienced something that affects our interpretation of scripture. We change our view on scripture after discussion with others as they in their studies reveal things that we wouldn't have found by ourselves, that is why shared bible study is so beneficial for all who can join with others to do it. It doesn't have to be people within our own church, it can work just as well with our Christian brothers and sisters of other churches, and it is wonderful to have that exchange of ideas and revelation in one another's lives.

Within our diocese our priests, deacons and ordinands spend time each year with the Bishop clergy conference, and there is found a most diverse group of well-educated and experienced Christians who regularly interact with one another on many issues about which they disagree but they hear the other's argument and they continue to live and work in communion with one another for the good of the diocese and to the Glory of God. And this is key, we must hear the other person's argument.

We are like the Pharisees and Sadducees, we each of us are working in the semi-dark when it comes to understanding issues of faith and theology. We have scripture, tradition,

experience and reason, the 4 pillars of the Anglican church, but we are mostly making our best guess about everything all the time. And yet this is one theme we can rely on, one route we can always take without fear of offending God, and that is to look at every situation through the lens of love. God is love, God calls us into loving relationship with the Almighty and with one another, bidding us to treat God as father, and to treat one another as brothers and sisters, members of the same family in Christ.

Every gospel message has love at its heart. Jesus said it over and over again, Love one another as I have loved you, love your neighbour as yourself, love your enemies. He was and is all about love, whatever the personal cost, whatever our first reaction to a given situation, whatever others think of us for doing it, our Christian call is to respond always with love, then the other things fall into place.

When we love one another we forgive the things that offend us, when we love one another we welcome everyone who walks through our church door whatever their background, when we love one another we look for ways to bring people to Christ rather than building hoops for them to jump through to join our club. When we love one another it is impossible not to keep all the other commandments and ordinances even when we are unsure of the right interpretation.

So let us go out into our community and live the gospel of love. Let us dispel the myth that being a Christian is about rules for life that are impossible to keep and about being better than everyone else. We don't compare ourselves with anyone else, just with the expectation of God.

St Francis of Assisi is believed to have once said, preach the gospel always and when necessary use words. May we in our lives lived in love and kindness to one another be beacons of the gospel in our neighbourhoods and families that all who know us will want to know Jesus who inspires us.