

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
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**Third Sunday in Lent, March 7, 2010**

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Hymns: 294, 264: 1-2, 415, 395:1-4, 54.

Lessons: Exodus 3:1-22, 1 Corinthians 15:35-58, Luke 20:27-40.

Sermon Text: Mark 12:18-27.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

It is still Tuesday of Holy Week, the same day as last Sunday's sermon. In Mark 12:13-17 the Pharisees and Herodians had just been put to shame by Jesus. They had just tried to trap Jesus by asking if it was right to pay taxes to Caesar or not. Sadducees, who do not believe in the resurrection from the dead, now ask Jesus a foolish question to mock him, and in so doing mock God. It is a foolish question, kind of like the foolish question of childhood: "If God is all-powerful, can he make a stone so big he can't lift it?" Just as Jesus didn't spend time on such foolish questions, neither should we. Now the Sadducees were about to try ridiculing him so they could trip Jesus. When Jesus debated with his enemies, he wasn't just quibbling over words. Jesus' answers come from the Holy Scriptures and he had said in Matthew 12:36 ***"But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word [that is, every idle word] they have spoken."*** He was deadly serious about what he said and to whom he said it. The goal of all he said should be our goal, too in talking to others: repentance and eternal life in the resurrection and following judgment of all mankind.

Jesus bluntly tells them that they do not know the Holy Scriptures. Jesus, in his omniscience knew they were Sadducees and didn't believe in the Resurrection, or believe in angels either. Today let's talk about

**A QUESTION FROM THE SADDUCEES MOCKING THE RESURRECTION**

- 1. Jesus dismisses their ridiculous question.**
- 2. Jesus teaches about the resurrection of the dead.**
- 3. He points out that God is the God of the living, not a God of the dead.**

The Sadducees were wealthy and sophisticated Jews who were small in number but influential in the administration of the temple in Jerusalem. At this time they controlled the high priesthood and a majority of the seats in the Sanhedrin, the council of 70 leaders of the Jews. They accepted only the five books of Moses as authoritative, while the Pharisees accepted all of the Old Testament. The Sadducees denied the resurrection of the body and did not believe in the existence of angels either, as we read in Acts 23: ***"(The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.)"*** Acts 23:8. The Sadducees took their name from the priest Zadok, a priest at the time of King David.

The Sadducees had seen their enemies, the Pharisees, humiliated by Jesus. Now they wanted to put Jesus to shame and to have themselves glorified and praised by the people. They felt convinced they could embarrass him and cause the people to question his authority. So they give him a difficult, or perhaps, they thought, an impossible question. They intended to ridicule any possibility of a physical resurrection and really wanted to embarrass and discredit Jesus.

Many today also deny the Resurrection, even many who claim the name Lutheran, as documented in **"What's Going On Among The Lutherans?"** (P. A. Leppien and J. K. Smith, Northwestern Publishing House, 1992) found in our church libraries. But Sadducees were more orthodox than the "modernists" since they still taught Moses wrote the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible, something which many liberals today deny.

In their question, the Sadducees make reference to what is called "levirate marriage". Moses wrote: ***"If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside the family.***

***Her husband's brother shall take her and marry her and fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to her. The first son she bears shall carry on the name of the dead brother so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel.*** Deuteronomy 25:5-6. “Levir” is the Latin word for “husband’s brother”, or “brother-in-law”. The purpose of this was to provide a descendant to inherit the dead brother’s estate. In the book of Ruth we find an example of how this worked. Reread the short book of Ruth to refresh yourself on this subject.

They wanted to make the situation appear as ridiculous as possible. So they elaborate on this situation from Deuteronomy. They talk not just about 2 brothers, but about 7 brothers. Is this a ridiculous question? To us, yes. But to the Jews, probably not. It could have happened, but would have been extremely rare. Two brothers they could understand. Three or more? Perhaps. But seven brothers?

Jesus didn’t get sucked in by their foolish question but zeroed in on the underlying errors – their ignorance of Scripture and their ignorance of the power of God. Jesus says that after the resurrection, the laws regulating life here on earth will no longer apply. There is no marriage in heaven. Jesus distinguishes between two ages: the present age and the age to come. One of the purposes of marriage is to bring children into the world. But in the age to come there will be neither birth nor death. And there will be no marriage. People will be like the angels.

Since there will be no death, there will be no need to marry and have children. It was for life on earth that the creator blessed Adam and Eve and said ***“Be fruitful and increase in number”*** Genesis 1:28. God instituted marriage in order that humanity might survive upon this earth and that this world might be populated. But in heaven no one will die and no one will be born, and there will be no need for marriage as God has instituted it for us in his Word. Heaven is not an extension of life as we know it on earth. The same physical and natural rules won’t apply. In this life, relationships are limited by time, death, and sin. Not so in heaven.

Then, because they also denied the existence of angels, Jesus told them that in the resurrection human beings ***“will be like the angels in heaven.”*** In our Gospel lesson from Luke, you heard ***“they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection.”*** Luke 20:36. Those who by God’s gracious judgment are privileged to live in that age are called by Jesus simply ***“God’s children”***. Earthly family relationships will have become unimportant. Now perhaps you have felt such great love for your spouse that you want to be with that person in heaven. We don’t know all the details of heaven. But everything will be so blessed and joyful that what we think are the joys of living with and of loving and of being loved by our spouses on earth will be insignificant compared to the joys of heaven. It is no accident that Jesus compares the Holy Christian Church, that is, all believers, to his bride, and that he often uses the picture of a bride and groom to illustrate the relationship between himself and believers.

Sidestepping their question about the much-married woman, he gave a definitive answer about the doctrine of the resurrection. Jesus goes on to attack their unbelief. He quotes Exodus, which you heard in our Old Testament lesson. We find the same words repeated in the book of Acts: ***“I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.’ Moses trembled with fear and did not dare to look”*** at the bush which was burning. Acts 7:32.

Jesus Christ knew the Holy Scriptures. He was, after all the very Son of God, called “The Word” in Scriptures. He was positive and sharp in his attack on them. He tells the Sadducees ‘You are wrong. You are in error.’ He tells them – and us – ***“Now about the dead rising--have you not read in the book of Moses, in the account of the bush, how God said to him, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!”*** Jesus makes reference to ***“the book of Moses, in the account of the bush”*** so hearers could locate Jesus’ specific reference and quotation. In the days of Jesus here on earth, the Old Testament had not yet been divided into chapters and verses for ease of reference.

When God spoke to Moses at the burning bush, Jacob had been dead and buried for about 400 years. The Lord was telling Moses and us that Abraham, his son Isaac, and his grandson Jacob were still very much alive, despite the fact that Abraham had been 100 years old when his son Isaac was born. And we acknowledge that fact every time we join in our communion liturgy when we sing “with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we laud and magnify [the] glorious name” of our Savior God. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob

also even at the time of Christ are alive in God's presence even though they had died centuries before. "***He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive.***" Luke 20: 38.

They were long dead, humanly speaking. But God continued to speak of his relationship to them as being in the present. This means that they still live. Human relationships end with death; but the relationship a person has with God goes on eternally.

The living God is the God of all the living. We are included among those who are truly alive because through Holy Baptism, through faith in the triune God, we are given an inheritance which can never perish. Listen to how Peter describes that: "***Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade--kept in heaven for you,***" 1 Peter 1:3-4.

To Nicodemus in John chapter three "***Jesus declared, 'I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.' 'How can a man be born when he is old?' Nicodemus asked. 'Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!' Jesus answered, 'I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.'***" John 3:3-6. That is why those who are born twice die only once, while those who are born only once die twice.

As children of God, we confess, "I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting." We know that our bodies will be resurrected to be reunited with our souls in heaven for all eternity. In John chapter 5 Jesus tells us: "***For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him. 'I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man. Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out--those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.'***" John 5:21-29.

Since God is the God of the living, that also involves the resurrection of the body at the end of time. God does not permit death to destroy his covenant, or his believers. This very fact would be proved less than a week after our sermon text when our Lord Jesus would rise from the dead. God's promise of the resurrection and eternal life may really be beyond our understanding, but since it is his promise we will comfort ourselves with it in life and death and as we face the last day. Though my body must be transformed and made fit for heaven, I will be the same person who was accepted by the Lord in the sacrament of Holy Baptism when he declared me his child and heir.

St. Matthew tells us "***When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at his teaching.***" So we too, must be amazed and astonished at this marvelous message of eternal life Jesus brings to us today. The true God is Our God, and we shall rejoice at the resurrection from the dead, when our bodies will be raised unto eternal life. Amen.