

*27Some Sadducees, those who say there is no resurrection, came to him 28and asked him a question, “Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies, leaving a wife but no children, the man shall marry the widow and raise up children for his brother. 29Now there were seven brothers; the first married, and died childless; 30then the second 31and the third married her, and so in the same way all seven died childless. 32Finally the woman also died. 33In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had married her.” 34Jesus said to them, “Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage; 35but those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. 36Indeed they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection. 37And the fact that the dead are raised Moses himself showed, in the story about the bush, where he speaks of the Lord as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. 38Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive.”*

I heard a story years ago that goes something like this:

A man dies and goes to heaven and is greeted by St. Peter. “In order to get you off to a good start up here I will take you on a tour,” Peter said.

So off they went – past the swimming pools, through the rose gardens and by the basketball courts. They went through the restaurants and the classrooms for learning – toured the shop for woodworking and the exercise rooms. Then they came to a place where signs were posted – quiet – no talking. Peter put his finger to his lips as they tiptoed down a hallway – past a door with no window. As soon as they were out of the quiet zone the newcomer said to Peter, “Why all the quiet in that section?”

“Oh, that is where the Lutherans live – they think they are the only ones up here.”

Sometimes groups of people think they have all the truth. In Jesus’ day the Sadducees were like that.

Saducees were of the priestly family – descendants of Levi, son of Jacob. The tribe of Levi did not receive land when the children of Israel came into the promised land. Each of the other tribes was assigned to a region that was its land but the tribe descended from Levi was designated as priests. Sadducees were born into a role of serving in the temple - receiving their income from the sacrifices and offerings the people brought. Not all from the tribe of Levi were Sadducees but this was a select group, an inner circle of the most powerful of the priests. Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the dead as the Pharisees and most of the people did. Sadducees regarded only the first five books of the Bible as scripture – the books called the Pentateuch that tradition held were written by Moses. Since there was no teaching about people being raised from the dead in these five books the Sadducees rejected the idea of life after death. Knowing that Jesus had told parables that spoke about life after death they came to him with a question designed to show how ridiculous was this idea of resurrection.

“Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies, leaving a wife but no children, the man shall marry the widow and raise up children for his brother. Now there were seven brothers; the first married, and died childless; then the second and the third and so in the same way all seven died childless. In the resurrection, therefore whose wife will the woman be? For all seven had married her.”

Jesus said to them, “Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage; but those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection of the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. Indeed they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection. “

Now to tell you the truth, for much of this week I had planned to tiptoe right on by this passage. No marriage in heaven? I cannot tell you how many times I have heard people speak about loved ones being reunited in heaven and I have nodded. They do not want to hear that there is no marriage in heaven. Like the Sadducees question implies, we would like to think that things that are precious to us in this life will carry right on into the kingdom of God. Parents and children, friendship, marriage, religious differences, a good name we have earned for ourselves – it

is difficult to imagine that eternal life would be so special if all of these are lost to us. But what of the one that wanted a child but never had one in this life? Would eternity be a constant reminder of that sorrow as others gathered with their families?

In the book of Revelation after a new heaven and a new earth have come down from God the one seated on the throne declares: "Behold I make all things new." All things new. Not life as it has been on earth extended into eternity but a new creation. Who are our brothers and sisters in eternity? The whole people of God. Not just the people that were born of the parents that we come from but people of every race and nation. Sisters and brothers. Not just Lutherans or Catholics but everyone that Jesus will bring to share that life. Sisters and brothers.

The church of Jesus Christ is a people called to live by the vision of that new creation. Though we are called to be faithful in the relationships of family and community and nation Jesus' words about marriage can lead us to think beyond these relationships. To think about this we could look at something simple like the passing of the peace. I do not know if any of you have noticed but when I pass the peace to Sue or my children I do exactly the same as I do with each of you – a handshake, a word of peace. While I am closer to them in this life than I am to any of the rest of you in Christ I am not. In Christ dearest friend and worst enemy are all greeted with the same greeting. At the table we receive Christ together and are united in him. All earthly distinctions are overcome.

Now to people like the Sadducees who have their lives just the way they want them this is not good news. But to the man who has just gotten fired and the boy who has no friends at school belonging to one another in Christ can mean everything. Christ is making all things new and he is starting here as we gather in worship. All divisions, all distinctions overcome as we share in one Lord Jesus Christ.

So it shall be forever. Amen.