

Luke 20:27-38
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“Don’t Sweat the Small Stuff”

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“Don’t sweat the small stuff.” “Don’t make a mountain out of a molehill.” “Don’t blow things out of proportion.” Most of us have heard this advice at one time or another and perhaps some of us have given this advice to someone we thought was exerting far too much time and energy on a issue that was out of their control.

At the beginning of our faith story today we are told the Sadducees, who do not believe in the resurrection, come to Jesus with a hypothetical question. This is not an honest question; the church always welcomes honest questions, but these leaders have come to try to mock our Savior’s belief in the resurrection.

At the root of the Sadducees very strange question is an ancient Law recorded in Deuteronomy 25:5-10, called Levirate Marriage, this law established that, “the brother of a deceased man is obliged to marry his brother's widow.” It’s a strange law to us who recognize women are not the property of their husbands but in antiquity, Levirate marriage made it clear that the living brother had a responsibility to care for the widow’s needs and even help propagate children in his brother’s name. Failure to comply was punishable by public humiliation. This is where the Sadducees get this strange question about passing a woman among 7 brothers as each one dies. It’s an elaborate situation, these men had been in their studies for hours, perhaps days Snap chatting to each other as they formed a question they thought would trap our Savior.

The sad thing is the Sadducees are playing games with issues that are of paramount importance to us. We yearn to know what Heaven is like. We desire to know if we will recognize our loved ones when we arrive around heaven’s banquet table. These Sadducees have turned some of the most profound questions of our heart into a shameless trap for Jesus, but as usual Jesus is far ahead of them.

According to these Sadducees the seven brothers married the widow one by one, as each met with the same fate, no children and then death. The seven-time widow eventually dies. And they ask, "In heaven whose wife, is she?" Jesus tells them: God is God of the living, not the dead. Essentially saying, the afterlife is out of our control, only God knows, so don’t make a federal case out of this.” Or maybe Jesus said, “life is too short to stuff a mushroom.” Or a favorite I found this week, “let’s not create a storm in a teacup.”

In this story Jesus affirms life, while at the same time educates about life after death...

Jesus points out life here on earth and life after death are not alike. Then he teaches that there is no marriage in "that age." Next, he reveals that there is no death in "that age." Finally, he describes the redeemed as angels, seeing and serving and praising God.

People who teach the practice of mindfulness tell us that when we are sweating the small stuff too much it can be an indicator that we are out of balance. They provide some good advice; we should slow down, get some decent rest, breathe, and avoid stressful people or situations. They advise we create space. Space our commitments. Pace ourself. Put off what doesn't need doing today. Put spacers in between everything they teach. Allow ourself lots of downtime. One author says, "call it 'think time' if it helps." And if we can't find space in your day, then perhaps it's time to transform make some big changes.

Lately I have been re-reading an interesting little book called, "Heidegger and a Hippo Walk Through Those Pearly Gates". While numerous schools of philosophy differ on the idea of eternal life, Dr. Paul Tillich speaks about eternity as the Eternal Now. I am not suggesting this is exactly what Jesus is saying, but it is interesting to contemplate. Eternal life for Tillich is not endless life in the "sweet by and by"; it is life lived in the Eternal Now. This is the condition in which all reality is experienced in the present, with the past contained only in memory and the future only in anticipation or speculation. Tillich says, at times we fall out of touch with the eternal dimension; we become separated from it and fall into despair, but it is there just the same. To understand this we have to jump out of linear time as we experience it... the before and after, see- you-next-Saturday kind of time we normally think of. Instead try to get our minds around the idea of Time itself—Time as dimension, time as an organizing principal. If we take eternity to mean timelessness, then, the eternal life belongs to those who live in the present."

Jesus may not have gone this far in replying to the Sadducees that day, but he did indicate that even this attempt to trap him was a waste of good "now" living time.

We will never have sufficient knowledge about the afterlife, but faith in God means our lives can still be lived with a sturdy amount of hope, a hearty amount of daring, a robust sense of adventure, and a powerful amount of confidence as we serve and care for each other and the world. God's promise of life beyond death gives life a certain dimension that breeds courage for living today.

I remember Mabel Kutzok, a faithful woman in my first church. She had seen many difficult times in her life and faced rounds of health issues. Ann and I were walking out the door to head to my parents' home for Memorial Day weekend family gathering and the phone rang. I stopped by the hospital, Mabel was in ICU, having just decided not to have any further procedures. I said, "Mabel are you sure? You have been a fighter your whole life, why stop now? she replied, "This is too big, this is bigger than me, God has forgiven me, I am at peace with this decision, and trust I will be with God, I will be ok."

Even with all that is not known about heaven, the church helps us as people of faith to have confidence because...

We are a community that believes in the resurrection.

We are a community that believes God's love wins.

We are a community where all are welcome to share their story and live their faith.

We are a community that wants to move beyond the superficial and get deep.

And being this sort of community means...

We pursue justice – not because it assures us we will get into heaven, but because we follow Jesus and care about this world.

We pursue welcome –not to manipulate others but because we are a people who believe we can have unity in diversity.

We pursue truth – because even though we won't grasp it completely or perfectly, we know truth is worth pursuing, together.

We build community – not because we are all like, or agree on everything, but because Christ first loved us and calls us to Love each other.

So, as we navigate life each day, let's remember Jesus' lesson today, "You don't need an elephant gun to kill a gnat."

Amen people of God? Amen