

Sermon
St. Mary's Nanoose
November 6, 2016.
Luke 20:27-38 (Remembrance Day)

I can remember at the tender age of 7, lying on the couch in the sunroom, wondering about my grandmother. I had just learned that I had been named after her - Selinde - but I had never met her. She had died before I was born. My father told me some stories about her so she was quite real in my imagination, but, she was dead. Gone. If she had existed, I knew she had to be somewhere. But where? My solution to that problem was to have her floating out in space. That worked for a very short while. Until I imagined how cold and lonely she would be. I started crying and ran to find my mother for solace. I'm not sure she totally understood what I was on about but willingly sat and held me until I calmed down. I remember that day clearly because my question was never answered.

Today's reading from Luke about Jesus' argument with the Sadducees talks about a similar experience except in this passage, there is an answer and a very clear one at that. The Sadducees are challenging Jesus' understanding of Scripture in the hopes of humiliating him in front of his followers. The Sadducees were the religious leaders who had primary authority over the temple, were a sect that believed only in the Pentateuch; the first five books of the Old Testament, or Hebrew Bible. They didn't hold the other books of the Hebrew Bible to be authoritative. The Pharisees, in contrast, did

believe in the other books of the bible – the Historical, Wisdom and Prophetic books. For the Sadducees, there was no resurrection. The Pentateuch, or first 5 books of the Hebrew Bible, made no reference to it.

In this passage, the Sadducees are referring to the passage from Deuteronomy which explains the way that heads of family are to protect and continue the family line. If a man dies, his brother is to marry the widow, thereby providing for the woman and ensuring the brother's line through his offspring is protected.

So the Sadducees put the impossible case to Jesus. If there were 7 brothers, all who die in succession, each marrying the widow of the first, whose wife will she be in the so called "after life"?

Jesus' answer is clear and two-fold. Firstly, he says, "as children of the resurrection," the laws and reality of this world have no bearing on what life with God beyond death will be. This might not seem like much of an answer but really, it is. Basically Jesus is saying that life after death is unlike anything we can imagine. So he doesn't bother describing in words what cannot be described. But we get the clear sense that there is life, and it is with God. And that the limits of our relationships on earth are transcended. He says, "Those who die are like angels and children of God," which hints at a very beautiful, intimate and inclusive bond. This is infinitely reassuring.

The second thing Jesus says is that our God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. He makes this point by leading the Sadducees in their own knowledge of scripture to show that Moses asserted that

God was the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. In other words, a God of the living, not of the dead. That all who live in God, live on. This too, is infinitely comforting.

So in this short passage, in a confrontation meant to trip up Jesus and make him out to be a fool, Luke gives us the grounds for believing in the resurrection. In clear terms. Not trying to convince; but rather stating the facts, the truth.

And by his life and death, Jesus gives us the ultimate confirmation of the resurrection. Life is a mystery. Death is real. And death is not the final word. We can't know what happens after death but we have the promise and we have hints of the resurrection.

Our God is a God of the living. There are many ways we participate in this living relationship with the dead. Tiny ways, but ways that give us hope, comfort and a sense of promise.

One obvious way we touch into resurrection is through the keeping alive of memories. Many of you will know what I'm talking about. When we tell others, especially our own offspring, stories of the one who is no longer with us, does that person come to life and have an impact on the listeners? We see how stories and memories transcend death.

Another way we touch into this life that transcends death is through our collective history. We are descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and when we learn about our history, which is Jesus' history, we become part of something larger than ourselves. We become part of God's walk through the world. We can learn, be

inspired, feel part and know we are not alone because of our collective history.

Another way we blow apart the myth of death having the final word is through the experiences that many people have of sensing the presence of a loved one who has passed on. I, for example, have had the sense of my parents cheering me on when I find myself in a difficult situation in which I'm being called to meet the challenge. I've had this experience several times in past years. And hopefully all of us have experienced the presence of Jesus at some time in our lives.

The last way I want to mention is through prayer. As Anglicans, we say we believe in the communion of saints - the community of believers through time. We pray for those who have gone before us, and they pray for us. Our bond transcends death and has the power to work with God in God's mission on earth.

These mysterious, profound and ultimately very real ways of transcending the bonds of death give us the reassurance that death is not the final word and that resurrection is something we can look forward to with certainty. How it will look, feel, be - we honestly can't say. But we have the assurance. And claiming that assurance gives us the courage and calm to proceed without giving into fear and despair.

Today we particularly stop to think and bring to life those who lost their lives in service of freedom and democracy. In this way, we refuse death, hatred and war to have the final word. We focus on the courage, the selflessness, the love and commitment of those who fell in battle. We do not forget them; we keep their stories alive; we take

inspiration from them to work for peace in the world, and we look for them in the resurrection.

Amen.