

## A WHOLE NEW WORLD

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LUKE 20:27-38

### The Resurrection and Marriage

<sup>27</sup> Some of the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Jesus with a question. <sup>28</sup> “Teacher,” they said, “Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. <sup>29</sup> Now there were seven brothers. The first one married a woman and died childless. <sup>30</sup> The second <sup>31</sup> and then the third married her, and in the same way the seven died, leaving no children. <sup>32</sup> Finally, the woman died too. <sup>33</sup> Now then, at the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?”

<sup>34</sup> Jesus replied, “The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. <sup>35</sup> But those who are considered worthy of taking part in the age to come and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, <sup>36</sup> and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God’s children, since they are children of the resurrection. <sup>37</sup> But in the account of the burning bush, even Moses showed that the dead rise, for he calls the Lord ‘the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>38</sup> He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive.”

It is interesting that much of what we think of as reality is based on what we have experienced already. And it is equally worth noting that most of us are usually more comfortable when we deal with things we are familiar with—things we have done so many times we can almost do them without thinking about them. Have you ever noticed that little tinge of anxiety that comes up when you find yourself being invited to do things we have never done before—or if we have done those things before but are being asked to do them differently we don’t really like it. Such things as going to a new school, a new job, into a new marriage, moving into a new community, facing health issues you have never faced before. One of the catch words that is found in many churches around the world gives credence to this idea. That phrase is “*we haven’t done it that way before.*”

I would suggest that even in our relationship with God and the people in the part of the world where God has placed us we are often tempted to think in repetitive patterns or perhaps to use another phrase, we think “*too small.*” Our vision of the future is based on what we have known before, on the basis of past experience. Our scripture lessons for this morning find Jesus beckoning some people to move into a new world of thinking and living—a world where God was creating a new heaven and a new earth, where there were possibilities yet to be imagined not limited by perceptions of what could be, based on what had been.

The song from Alladin helps make the point, specifically the song, *A Whole New World*.

*I can show you the world  
Shining, shimmering, splendid  
Tell me, princess, now when did  
You last let your heart decide?  
I can open your eyes  
Take you wonder by wonder  
Over, sideways, and under  
On a magic carpet ride  
A whole new world  
A new fantastic point of view  
No one to tell us no*

*Or where to go  
Or say we're only dreaming  
A whole new world  
A dazzling place I never knew  
Unbelievable sights  
Indescribable feeling  
Soaring, tumbling, freewheeling  
Through an endless diamond sky  
A whole new world  
A hundred thousand things to see  
I'm like a shooting star, I've come so far  
I can't go back to where I used to be  
A whole new world (every turn a surprise)  
With new horizons to pursue (every moment, red-letter)  
I'll chase them anywhere, there's time to spare  
Let me share this whole new world with you  
A whole new world (a whole new world)*

To help put today's lesson into perspective I would suggest it is an interesting lesson for us as we move every closer to the end of the church year. We will start the Christian calendar again with our celebration of Advent on December 1, the first Sunday of December.

But, during this time of the Christian year we revisit some of the stories of Christ that we noted during Lent. In the lesson for today Jesus is moving toward his cross. The relationship between those who were interested in maintaining the status quo and Jesus was getting ever more tense. In our text we overhear Jesus being examined by some religious leaders of his day, the Sadducees. The Sadducees, as you may recall, are sort of the religious conservatives of their day. They do not believe in the possibility of the resurrection of the dead. Which puts them in a very different category from those who consider themselves to be conservatives in today's church.

In their attempt to trick Jesus on issues they consider to be the orthodoxy of their time they bring a tough case to him hoping to trip him up and show the absurdity of a belief in a life to come. They give him this story. There is this woman who has suffered greatly. She has been through a whole succession of weddings, then an equal number of sad funerals. But one can hardly see the plight of this woman and her successive tragedies because she has become a weapon in Jesus' critics' war of words against him.

After all the weddings and all the funerals Jesus is asked, *"Whose wife will she be in the resurrection of the dead?"*

It is a trick question because, after all, the Sadducees who are asking the question don't even believe in the resurrection of the dead. Their purpose is not genuine inquiry. They have already decided, based upon what they perceive in their world to be reality for all times and all places, the answer to their question.

And, on the surface, in this question they appear to have really trapped Jesus. She can't be married to one husband in the resurrection, because she has been married to each of these men. It doesn't seem fair that, in the afterlife, she should be married to her last husband because, after all, she was married to six others. Therefore, they have concluded according to their rules of logic, there is no resurrection.

But Jesus replies to them with a whole new logic. He says: *"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 from 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 he is God not of the dead, but of the*

living" (Lk 20:34-36, 38).

This is perplexing issue to grapple with, but do you see what's going on here? The Sadducees are questioning Jesus on the basis of this world, the world that they know. This woman has been the property of first one man, then another. She is nothing unless she is the wife of a man. You say there is a life in the age to come? Then whose property will she be?

They might as well be speaking of a piece of their property in their way of thinking!

Jesus responds by saying, in effect, "You are thinking on the basis of the old world—about how things are in this present arrangement. But the age to come, the resurrection, is a whole new world, the world not as we have made it in our unjust social arrangements, but the world as God intends it to be. The age to come is a whole new way of life that you cannot even comprehend."

It appears to be the perfect trick question, for how will Jesus be able to judge which man she rightly belongs to?

Jesus responds by telling his examiners that the resurrection is a whole new way of life, a whole new world, a world that they cannot even begin to comprehend in their closed, conservative, limited view of things. They assume that things in the life that is to come must be a continuance of this world as they know it. What happens now will happen then, for eternity. If women are property of this or that husband now, they will be so then.

But Jesus paints an evocative portrait of the age to come and beckons his hearers to consider that whole new world. I would like for us to consider that whole new world in light of the God of which Jesus often spoke. God's new kingdom, Jesus is saying, is not just a world improved; it is a whole new world, where the seemingly intractable injustice of this world is set right and a whole new way of visioning reality is offered.

Very often our sermons relate the suggestion that there is a pettiness to our view of the Christian life. We preach in order to motivate us to get out there and live a better life, to work for a better world. Today I invite you out to a whole new world, a new world that comes, not as the result of our earnest efforts, but of the loving work of God who invites us always into uncharted places, as has been the case since he started this journey with Father Abraham, so long ago.

You and I are far too limited in our thinking. We think on the basis of what we have previously experienced. But Jesus, in speaking of the resurrection, God's promised whole new world, speaks of something that is beyond our present experience, something that we can know only through hope, through faith in the triumph of the loving purposes of God.

This is the very basis of our great hope. There are some wrongs in this world that God has given us the means to set right, and we ought to do so. Sunday worship ought to be motivation for us to get out of here and into the world and serve God by doing God's will in the world—now.

But there are some injustices so massive, some heartaches so deep, that we cannot make it right through our sincere efforts. There are pains that happen that cannot be made right simply by being a world improved. What we need is a whole new world. And that, we believe, comes among us by the grace of God. We believe that in Jesus we catch a glimpse, have a foretaste of the new world breaking in among us. It is not here in completeness, but it is on the way, glimpsed in word and music here on Sunday morning, when we get it right, one day seen in its fullness at the final triumph of God. We are invited to think in new ways about all things. The new age cannot be accommodated by old ways of thinking and doing.

This was also illustrated by Jesus in another text many of you will remember from the gospel of Matthew. It says, in Matthew 9:17 "*Neither is new wine put into old wineskins.*"

Parables are often used when the raw truth is too strong to be heard.

There once was a woman who owned the finest winery in all the land. Everything about the winery was superb. The fertile land yielded some of the finest grapes to be found. The large wooden vats that nurtured the crushed grapes until maturity produced the world's most exquisite wine. For more than two centuries people came from all over the world to visit the winery and drink the famous wine.

One day the wine developed a bitter taste. No one could explain why. Nothing had changed. The wine was still made exactly as it had been made the last two centuries. Winery visitors and customers began to decline. In desperation, the woman hired consultants from all over the world to discover the reason for the wine's sudden bitter taste. After days of study, each expert arrived at the same diagnosis—the vats had outlived their usefulness. They were old and sour with no way of being cleaned and restored. The consultants concluded that the woman's only option was to replace the old vats.

She was outraged. The beautiful vats had been in her family longer than she had. To the woman, family traditions were more important than the decline of her winery. She made desperate attempts to improve her wine. She tried different fertilizers, changed the acidity of the ground, designed new labels on the bottles, and even hired a new overseer of the grapes. But she continued to put the wine into the old wooden vats. And the finest grapes in the world continued to produce bitter wine.

The number of the winery's visitors and customers continued to diminish until the day arrived when no one came to taste or buy the wine. The only remaining customers were the faithful members of the family for whom family traditions were more important than making satisfying wine.

The owner of the winery knew why the grapes were making bitter wine. She had all the knowledge she needed to restore her winery to its former glory. But she lacked the courage to use the knowledge at her disposal to make the changes necessary to produce satisfying wine. Jesus said, *"Neither is new wine put into old wineskins; otherwise, the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and the skins are destroyed; but new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved"* (Mt 9:17).

Let us assume the wineskin Jesus is talking about is the church. But if we who want to be followers of Christ want to be an instrument to be used by God to bring transformation to the world we have to be open to seeing a whole new world.

It has been interesting how the things we have been studying on Wednesday evenings about the Book of Acts serve also as an excellent way of seeing things. Our author reminded us: *"According to the Gospels, Jesus spoke about "the kingdom of God" more than any other people. He wasn't talking about a place, like a far-off heaven, where none of our problems can follow us. "The kingdom of God" refers to the state of affairs in which God's gracious intentions for humanity and all creation finally become full actualized. That new reality begins to emerge in Jesus' presence and activity, here on earth."*

If you turn back in your bibles to chapter 17 of Luke you find these words: *"Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the Kingdom of God was coming, and he answered, "The Kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, "Look, here it is!" or "There it is!" For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you."*

As we look at the four corners of world today, near and far, we will notice that we are in need of the kingdom being born in people around this globe. We come close to the end of another church year, the calendar soon leads us to new beginnings as we study the life and teaching of our Lord again. Can we do so with the confidence and joy that it is in the hands of a loving God.

What will happen next? Where will the unconfined word of God go? What will it stir up? Where will the followers of Jesus find the Holy Spirit urging them to hear the good news in fresh, expanding ways and to communicate it to others?

Take courage, the larger story—concerning the Word of God is not over!! Where next will it come with Pentecostal power on this globe to spark a new interest in hearing and attempting to live out the message heard of the Kingdom of God?

In us perhaps?