

TRINITY NEWS

Pentecost 25 Luke 20:27-40 Insights into Eternity framed by Christ

The Sadducees, the Jewish fundamentalists or textual literalists, emerged to challenge Jesus. Jesus had much in common with the Pharisees but he had little in common with the Sadducees. He was creative with the Biblical Text, drawing from it *Halachah*, "principles of life grounded in experience" rather than further "definitive instructions" (*Torah*). The Sadducees tested Jesus with an extreme and improbable question about marriage. That is, if a man died childless and the man's brother married his wife in order to secure the family name and line with the birth of a son, what would happen if he died still childless? The original husband had six brothers and his widow married them all one after the other, as each one died, without ever bearing a child. Whose wife then would she be at the General Resurrection at the last day? The desperate situation of a woman having to marry seven brothers does not enter into the equation! What a fate!

Jesus replied: "The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection" (Luke 20:34-36). The unusual use of angels in this context is probably due to the intention of erasing all notions of sexuality in heaven. No one ever thought of an angel having sexual propensities! That which remains in heaven is identity, personality, and relationships, though in another context. We cannot define heaven except as a place where God's glory is everywhere apparent. Yet resurrection is not for all, but only for those who are 'judged worthy' because of their faith-trust in Christ and Abba, and have genuine outcomes of their faith. Jesus then uses an argument that draws on a seminal event. The burning of the Seneh bush in the presence of Moses on Mt. Sinai leads in Exodus 3:6 to the revelation that this is the fiery presence of the "God of

Abraham, and the God of Jacob.” The name of God revealed there is that of Being itself. This is deathless Being which preserves life and sustains those who are drawn into the ‘circle’ of life itself. All who are caught up in the living God are still alive.

This is a crucial text for believers because it is a rare insight into Jesus’ own view of heaven. It comes to us in language stretched to the limits. Our minds are drawn into a panorama which is so vast that it has no boundaries, no beginning and no end. The insights here offer great hope for those who are troubled by what lies beyond death. Every experienced pastor has met believers who are vocal in their faith but troubled at the end and fearful of death. No religious gloss on their concerns is of much help. We have to enter their fears and reassure them of the living God and the incredible, miraculous, wonderful and utterly true defeat of death by Jesus.

Sometimes life is like a small sandstorm that keeps changing directions. You change direction but the sandstorm chases you. You turn again, but the storm adjusts. Over and over you play this out, like some ominous dance with death just before dawn. Why? Because this storm isn't something that blew in from far away, something that has nothing to do with you. This storm is you. It is something inside you. So all you can do is give in to it, step right inside the storm, closing your eyes and plugging up your ears so the sand doesn't get in, and walk through it, step by step. There's no sun there, no moon, no direction, no sense of time, just fine white sand swirling up into the sky like pulverized bones. That's the kind of sandstorm you need to imagine.

And you really will have to make it through that violent, metaphysical, symbolic storm. No matter how metaphysical or symbolic it might be, make no mistake about it, it is real: it will cut through flesh like a thousand razor blades. People will bleed there, and you will bleed too.

And once the storm is over you won't remember how you made it through, how you managed to survive. You won't even be sure, in fact, whether the storm is really over. But one thing is certain. When you come out of the storm you won't be the same person who walked in again. That's what this storm is all about.

And that is what the Cross-Resurrection event is about in its endless repetitions in us as we go forward as a Resurrection People in a Good Friday World. Thanks to Abbot Stephen Morrissy for refining the example.

Bishop Arthur Jones

THIS WEEK:

Wednesday.

- Bible Study, 10:00am
- Group discussion, 7:30pm, Rectory

NEXT WEEK:

- November 13. Remembrance Sunday, 9:30a.m.

TO PLAN:

November 20.

- NCCP Sunday, 9:30
- Joint Thanksgiving service, 6:30 p.m., Union Church of Manila.

November 24.

- Thanksgiving Dinner, 7:30, Parish Hall. Tickets are now available at the Parish Office.

NEXT WEEK'S READINGS:

Malachi 3:13-4:2a,5-6; Psalm 98; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13;
Luke 21:519