

April 5 2014

### **Scripture Lessons**

*Psalm 118: 1-2, 14-24*

*Mark 16:1-8, p. 931*

*Luke 20:27-38, p. 960*

### **Sermon**     *The Question of God*

Some years ago there was an extensive survey conducted here in the United States questioning people of various ages. They were questioning people of various occupations. The key question in that survey was this. What are you looking for most in life? What are you looking for most in life? And when the results were compiled the analysts were shocked. Most of them expected answers that suggested some kind of materialistic goals on the part of most people.

But the top three things that people wanted most in life were simply these: Love, Joy and Peace. The first three of the nine fruits of the spirit that St. Paul wrote about in Galatians five. And which, also, was the theme of our Lenten Services for this year. Maybe when you think about it, then most real questions, questions that really matter in life are based in one question. The question of God. The questions of the ultimate things in the universe. Even our friends and neighbors question and wrestle with the very existence of God. We have to deal with these ultimate questions in life, what meaning or purpose in there in human life? Is there any sort of grand design behind the creation of the universe? What are we as human beings to learn from the suffering, the violence, death all around us in the world or on the other hand what are we to learn about from the acts of goodness, the acts of bravery, of which points us toward life and finally is there anything beyond this life and if so what?

Our passage from Luke's Gospel for today attempts to deal with the question of ultimate things, too. Though that question is hidden in the form of a riddle that the Sadducees asked Jesus, which I think with the aim of trapping him, either there is in their minds nothing after this life, no resurrection in their Bible or their Torah- and the first five books in our Bible is wrong.

The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection, this whole game seems to be a kind clever debating trick as I have mentioned before and I am pretty sure that it

was, but Jesus takes the question seriously. And what I think he does is hear the question behind the question. He hears the ultimate question, the question of God and the kind of God that God is.

The question then is not really about the poor widow who gets passed from husband to husband and not really about the concept of resurrection in general. But instead about the very nature of God. You see the fact the Sadducees were willing to fit God into their world based on their interpretation of the five books of their Torah also more than willing to ask Jesus all kinds of hard questions based on their narrow view of the universe but what they were not willing to do was to be questioned by God, the God of love, the God whose grace that often surprises us and really shattered our limited view of the universe around us. That God frightened them I think; in fact that God frightens us sometimes, too. Because that God refuses to be reduced to a series of simple, do this', do that', then you will get your reward in Heaven and slam bam, thank you mam and that is the end of it. That God of love; that God of grace wanted and still wants more and this God wants their hearts and our hearts and wants to give them more to them as well and us life, an abundant life; which is why the answer that Jesus gives becomes an answer of not some subject for rigid debate only but as it is lived out in the life and death and the empty tomb of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus says in this first passage or second passage, now he was not the God of the dead but of the living, all lived to him.

There is a man named Henry Harbock, a 19<sup>th</sup> century pastor and educator in the Pennsylvania Dutch tradition of the United Church and he summed it up this way in his famous hymn called "Jesus I Lived to Be." Harbock wrote, Jesus I Lived to be, the loveliest, the best. My life in thee, my life in me died in love in rest, and there in the light of God's love to see what it means to live to him.

As the two Marys, James' mother and Salome went to anoint Jesus' body on that very first day of the week according to Mark's Gospel; love and life were the last things on their minds. Jesus' life, the love, the grace, the hope that he brought had all come to an abrupt end there was no two ways about it, at least in their mind. But the God of Abraham the God of Isaac the God of Jacob the God not of the dead but the God of living but this God that always lived and worked outside the box, God saw this life, this death, this empty tomb, quite differently.

In First Corinthians, St. Paul writes that God shows what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. God shows what is weak in the world to shame what is strong. God shows in the world what is low and despised even things that bring to nothing that so no human being might boast in the presence of God. The story of Jesus then gives us comfort, The story of Jesus gives us hope, walking with and embracing us when we struggle day by day and bring life out of midst of death is what God is doing every single day for each one of us.

The young man all in white sitting on the right side of the empty tomb immediately said to the frightened women, "Do not be afraid." You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised. He is not here. Look there is the place that they laid him. And so the question of God remains. What kind of God is our God? And Jesus answered, I think, whole heartedly, he is not the God of fear. He is not the God of death. He is the God of love. He is the God of life. And together we say AMEN.