

March 27 2016 Easter Sunday

**Scripture Lessons ~**

Luke 20:27-38

Luke 24:1-12

**Sermon**        *What Was (Is) God Up To?*

One of my favorite, all time films portrays the fictional vicious rivalry between the famous Wolfgang Mozart played by Tom Hulce and the no longer famous court composer to the Austrian Emperor, Antonio Salieri, played by F. Murray Abraham. The movie, of course, is Amadeus, which won the Academy Award for the best motion picture in the year 1984. If you have ever seen the movie you know it fades in flashbacks as if witnessing first hand a confession between Salieri and his priest, toward the end of his life, of all the horrible, all the hateful things that he did and said and felt for his rival Mozart during the course of his life. In essence he tried to lure Mozart and bring on his early death in which he feels he was successful. We hear that during the course of the confession Salieri believes he has done every single thing he could in life to discipline himself, to glorify God with his music, but at the end of his life he was mediocre and completely forgotten by the public while Mozart in his estimation has lived a completely undisciplined debauched life and yet has become famous and has been given by God the gift of music. At one point in the confessional conversation between Salieri and his priest, Father, Vogler, Salieri cried in desperation to the shell-shocked priest, these loaded words, "What was God up to?" What was God up to? What is God up to?

When you think about it, the most important questions in life; questions that matter; questions about the ultimate things in the universe and it boils down to Salieri's question- what was God up to? What is God up to in our midst? You know, when we meet our friends and neighbors who may not believe in God and who questions the very existence of God which deal with these ultimate kinds of questions. What is the meaning or purpose of our human lives? Is there any sort of grand design behind in the creation of our universe? What do we learn from the suffering and violence and death all around us? Then on the other hand what do we learn from the acts of bravery and goodness and love which point us toward life? And finally is there anything beyond this life? And if so, what is it?

Our first passage from Luke's Gospel for today attempts to deal with the question of ultimate things, too. That question is hidden in a form of a riddle which the Sadducees asked Jesus with the aim of trapping him. In their minds there is nothing after this life and there is absolutely no resurrection in their Bible, the torah. So the torah, the first five books of our Bible is completely wrong Since the Sadducscs did not believe in a resurrection this whole game seems like a clever

debating trick on their part and as I mentioned before it was a clever debating trick. But Jesus takes this question seriously and he hears the question behind the question. He hears the ultimate question; the question is what is God up to? And the question of what kind of God, that God is? The question then is not really about the poor widow that is passed from husband to husband or the concept of the resurrection in general but instead that question is about the very nature of God. The Sadducees were willing to put God into their world and their interpretation of the five books of their Torah and also they were willing to ask Jesus the question based on their narrow view of the world but what they were not willing to do, was to be questioned by God. God who is love and God whose grace often surprises us and shatters our limited view of the universe around us; that God frightened them, I think, a lot. In fact that God would frighten each one of us because that God refuses to be reduced to series of a few simple do this or do that and then you are going to get your reward in heaven. That God of love, that God of grace wanted and still wants more, he wanted their hearts and wants our hearts and wanted to give more to them and to us life, life abundant.

Which is why the answer that Jesus gives is not an answer of some rigid subject of debate but it is lived out in life and the death and in an empty tomb of Jesus of Nazareth? Jesus says, as you recall from what Susan shared with us, Jesus is not the God of the dead but of the living.

I mentioned his name before in connection with my time in Pennsylvania, Henry Harbaugh 19<sup>th</sup> century pastor, and educator and a kind of saint in the Pennsylvania Dutch tradition, of the United Church of Christ, summed it up this way in a hymn we really ought to sing sometime. It is called, "Jesus I lived to Thee".

The loveliest and best.

My life in thee- thy life in me-

Thy blest love I rest...

There is in the light of God's love we see- we can live in him.

As Mary Magdalene, Mary of James' mother and Joanna came to anointed Jesus body on the first day of the week according to Luke's Gospel; the love and life were the last things on their life. Jesus' life love, and grace and the hope that Jesus brought had come to an abrupt end on that cross there were no two ways about it in their minds, that day that they went to the tomb, You know something, the God of Abraham, The God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, was not the God of the dead but of the living. This God, who lives and works outside the box sees this death and this empty tomb completely differently. I Corinthians St. Paul writes for us, that God choose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God choose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God choose what is low and

despised in the world even things are not, to bring to nothing; the things that are so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

The stories of Jesus gives us comfort, and hope and embraces us, he walks with us when we struggle and brings life out of death. That is exactly what God is doing for every single day for every single one of us every day. The young men dressed in dazzling white stood beside them and immediately said to those frighten women, “Why are you looking for the living among the dead, he is not here but he is risen, remember what he told you while he was still in Galilee that the Son of man must be handed over to sinners and crucified and on the third day rise again.

And so the question remains, what was God doing? What is God up to? What kind of God is our God? Salieri with his limited view in the movie would answer these questions. Is God doing his job? If God doesn't act as we expect? If God doesn't act as we want-he is not doing his job? But Jesus whole-heartily answers in response; he is not the God of fear. He is not the God of death. But the God of generosity, the God of Love, the God of life, the God not of the dead but instead the God of the living? And together we say AMEN.