

November 10 2013

**Scripture Lessons ~ *Job 19:23-27a***

*Luke 20:27-38*

**Sermon**      *Isn't One Enough?!*

Isn't one enough? I don't know if you knew about this before I get started but they did musicals even in ancient Israel and you know in the modern day there is a musical called Seven Brides for Seven Brothers, well this is seven brothers for one bride. Only one!

It is one thing for a woman to be part of a polygamist family, the one portrayed in that popular reality show that some people are watching these days where the lucky or in my opinion the unlucky man depending on how you look at it is married to three different wives with children by each wife and with another wife added to the other three to make 4. That would be one thing, but what about the poor widow in the bizarre scenario described by the Sadducees in the passage in Luke's gospel from today? Childless, she was passed down like inherited property from one brother to another after each died until she had been married to all seven brothers. She still had no children, and she herself died at the end of the passage. And then an even more bizarre question is asked by the Sadducees, since she had been with all seven brothers 'whose wife will she be in the next life?'. That is in the time of the resurrection from the dead. I bet Jesus must have rolled his eyes and said to himself, dear God, what in heaven's name does this have to do with the price of tea in China?

As is well documented the Pharisees and the Sadducees, two of Judaism's most learned and predominant sects during the time of Jesus were quite threatened by Jesus. Threatened by his unorthodox approach to faith and especially threatened by the way he educated the average person in his world. The constantly questioned him in public trying to catch him up, trying to discredit him, in the presence of his followers. But this story is tremendously strange, because does it not only present a next to impossible chain of events, in addition the Sadducees question

Jesus on a point of theology they don't even believe. And that point of theology is this, the resurrection from the dead. The life after death. That they did not believe in a resurrection is not an unusual thing based on the fact that in the Old Testament it takes a good many years for the theological evolution of that theology of resurrection to come about in development. Prior to that it was fairly common to believe that God's justice takes place right here, right now in this life and that after death there is what is called sheol, there is the pit, there is rest, and that is all.

But by Jesus' day, though many Jews and the Pharisees included began to allow the possibility of afterlife, complete with final reckoning with God that may well include rewards on one hand or punishments on the other. But this far the Sadducees would not go in their theology, and so when they posed this absurd question to Jesus, number 1 they did not believe in an afterlife anyway so their question was bogus to begin with, but number 2, would it even be possible for a poor widow to be passed from pillar to post her entire life by seven individual brothers? Well it is I suppose possible but very unlikely, but the third point though is really the most important for us of all because not did the Sadducees create an impossible hypocritical situation here, in addition they totally missed the mark of justice, a point of justice that had been a part of the Old Testament law for centuries and centuries.

You see in the Israel of Jesus' time there was no safety net as we at our best have for the poor and the elderly in our society. Most women did not work outside the home, or own property so they were completely dependent upon their husbands and their children to support them in a time of old age. The widow's husband in this story died and left her destitute but neither did she have children to support her after her husband's death. She was therefore alone unless she remarried one of her husband's brothers. And that was the point of the law of Moses in practical concern that she be taken care of not some bogus question about an afterlife that the Sadducees didn't believe in anyway. So they deliberately twisted scripture and a point of justice, so important in the Old Testament to meet their own selfish and misguided ends.

Well what of Jesus response to this crazy setup that they layout in this passage? What does he consider that is important for us to take away

from this scripture this morning? First of all Jesus states that it is useless to speculate as to what the next life will be like. Especially in such fantastic terms as the Sadducees have outlined here. They have sort of twisted scripture to their needs but in reality the next life as all of us well know is kind of a mysterious thing and probably will be different where this life where marriage is a pretty useful institution. In the next life we are not really sure what relationship is going to be like, but we can be sure of one thing in the next life. There will be a next life, and in the next life we will be in a relationship in the presence of the living God who is the God of not the dead, but of the living. Today then we are assured that our loved ones are not tied up in some weird series of events in the next life. Instead they too are in the loving presence of the living God who cares about our needs in this life and provides for us in the next life as well. And what about the poor widow in the story, the one who has moved through seven different marriages. I am pretty certain that she would appreciate what Jesus has to say here because looking at that family of seven brothers just standing back and taking a look at them, Jesus might even ask the widow, isn't one of those guys enough? Amen