

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

Luke reminded us several times in this Pentecost season that Jesus had come with a purpose—to be lifted up, to be taken up—therefore, Jesus had “*set his face to go to Jerusalem*” (Luke 9:51). In today’s Gospel, Jesus is there, in Jerusalem, “*teaching the people in the temple and preaching the gospel*” (Luke 20:1).

It’s there that Jesus encounters a group of men called “the Sadducees.” We don’t hear as much in the Gospels about the Sadducees as we do the Pharisees, but they were another sect of Jews. Not much is known about them. There are debates as to their origin. Their membership was primarily from among the priests, and so they didn’t survive long after the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. Their beliefs differed from the Pharisees in various ways. But they did agree with the Pharisees about one thing: Jesus was bad news and had to be opposed at every occasion.

Our gospel was another occasion to oppose Jesus. As I said, Jesus was in the temple preaching here in Luke 20, and Jewish leaders were opposing Him. Jesus had cleansed the temple, and some Jewish leaders challenged Him: “*Tell us by what authority you do these things, or who it is that gave you this authority.*” Jesus answered them with a question. I’ll answer your question if you answer mine: “*Tell me, was the baptism of John from heaven or from man?*” They were silenced. (Luke 20:1-7).

The leaders sent spies to try to trap Jesus and put Him on their Roman occupier’s radar: “*Is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar, or not?*” Jesus was not so easily fooled. You know how He answered. He took a coin, showed them the image on it, and said: “*render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.*” More silence. (Luke 20:20-25)

And so, in our Gospel, it was the Sadducees’ turn to try to catch Jesus on a bit of theology. You heard their hypothetical of the seven brothers and the childless wife. You heard the question: “*In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had her as wife.*” Of course, these Sadducees weren’t really interested in the answer, for they denied “*that there is a resurrection.*” They just thought they had given Jesus a good “gotcha” question.

The same thing happens today. People who oppose Christianity are always trying to think of ways to stump Christians with what they think are insurmountable problems, insoluble Bible difficulties, and unresolvable contradictions—as if Christians had never thought about such things. For example, the Bible says, “*Cain knew his wife*” (Gen. 4:17). So, they ask with a wry smile thinking “gotcha”: “*Whom did Cain marry?*” The answer is really quite simple and could hardly be otherwise for our forefathers to fulfill the Lord’s command to

*“Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth”* (Gen. 1:28). So Scripture says: *“The days of Adam after he fathered Seth were 800 years; and he had other sons and daughters”* (Gen. 5:4). Obviously, Cain married his sister.

You get the picture. So, the Sadducees thought they had given Jesus an insoluble problem; or perhaps Jesus could join them and say that *“there is no resurrection.”* They were wrong on both counts. Jesus answered it with panache.

He most assuredly did not join the Sadducees in their denial of the resurrection. Rather Jesus immediately talks about *“those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead.”* He called those worthy ones as *“being sons of the resurrection.”*

Jesus in no way denied the resurrection; rather, He proved it from the Scriptures. Now, if you were to try to prove the resurrection from the Old Testament, where would you go? After all, when Paul wrote that Jesus *“was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,”* he was talking about our Old Testament.

Well, you might turn to Job chapter 19 (25-27): *“I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another.”* That’s talking about Jesus’ resurrection and ours. Or maybe you would point to the account of Jonah prefiguring Jesus’ resurrection. Jesus did in Matthew and called it *“the sign of the prophet Jonah.”* *“For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth”* (Matt. 12:39-40). Or maybe you’d think of Ezekiel’s description of the valley of dry bones: *“you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people”* (Ezek. 37:13).

The problem was: the Sadducees didn’t accept these writings as authoritative. They considered only the five books of Moses as authoritative. Could you find support for the resurrection of the body in these five books? Jesus did. He turned to Exodus chapter 3, the account of the burning bush, and said, *“that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the bush, where he calls the Lord the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.”* And Jesus exegeted the passage for them, too: *“Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him.”* There is life after death; there is resurrection.

Finally, Jesus briefly answered their marriage question, too. The problem was not insurmountable, insoluble, or unresolvable. Their hypothetical didn’t apply, for in the resurrection, Jesus answered, we *“neither marry nor are given in marriage.”* We will be like the angels, holy—unable to sin, immortal—unable to die, and without a need to procreate.

It is important to us that Jesus spent this time to answer the Sadducees' "gotcha" question, for the doctrine of the resurrection is so very significant. Jesus' own resurrection is foundational. Along with Jesus' death on a cross for us, it's in that list of what Paul says is "*of first importance*" (1 Cor. 15:3). To be sure, "*we preach Christ crucified*" (1 Cor. 1:23). He was "was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate" (Nicene Creed). But St. Paul also tells us "*if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied*" (1 Cor. 15:16-19).

But the doctrine of the resurrection fills us with hope for eternal life. It assures us that Christ's perfect life substitutes for our sinful lives. It assures us that His sacrifice for sin was a sufficient ransom price for the sins of the world. It assures us that the Father was pleased with Jesus' sacrifice and now applies His merits to us. Therefore, Paul assures us, "*But now Christ has been raised from the dead,*" and so shall we, who "*who have fallen asleep*" trusting in Him, follow Him in resurrection victory (1 Cor. 15:20).

This past week LSUS devotions were at Bethlehem. We've begun teaching the Second Article of the Creed. That's easily divided up into two parts: "Who Jesus is" and "What Jesus has done." Our devotion leader did a good job talking about "Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary," our Lord (Small Catechism, Creed).

But being at Bethlehem, and thinking that the kids might want to ask about the symbolism in the church, at the end, he opened it up for questions. One question intersected nicely with this text before us. "How do we know that what Jesus did on the cross was good enough?" At least, that's how I remember the question.

In answering, the leader kept going back to the testimony of the Scriptures. Very well. They contain many wonderful promises, and many assertions. But how do you know they are true? The resurrection of Jesus from the dead! It's why Easter is our greatest festival! I wanted to help him—"Point them to the resurrection." I couldn't then; I talked to him about it later in the week. Jesus came not just to die for sin, not just to destroy him who has the power of death, but also to give life—resurrection and life.

I have devotions this week. The topic is "What Jesus did." Guess what we're going to talk about: Jesus' cross ... and resurrection. God grant me lips to teach and confess it clearly, and God grant us mouths that confess Jesus as Lord and hearts that believe in His resurrection from the dead, that we may be saved (Rom. 10:9).

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.