



Kirknewton and East Calder Parish Church of Scotland

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Sermon: Rev Dr André Groenewald

Reading: Luke 20.27-38

Background to the reading

The Sadducees were a political religious group existing of men who came from the most important families of society namely the priestly families and the aristocracy. THEY did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, angels or spirits. They also did not believe in the oral laws of the Pharisees. They only adhered to the Torah, the Law of Moses. They joined conservative religion with mighty politics. The centre of their power was the Temple. They were also loyal supporters of the foreign Roman occupation during the time of Jesus till the destruction of the temple in 70 AD. They were the opponents of the Pharisees, Jesus and any new ideas.

Now the Sadducees come and question Jesus on his views with regard to resurrection. They are off course referring to the practice that existed in those days namely that of a Levirate marriage. It was a practice installed by Moses to ensure the continuation of future generations. The levirate law is specified in Deut. 25:5-10. The brother of a man who dies without a son had an obligation to marry the wife who was left, and 'the first son whom she bears shall succeed to the name of his brother who is dead.' The term "levirate" is derived from Latin *levir*, a husband's brother. Either a brother or the nearest male kin was required to raise up seed to the same of

the deceased. If the obligation was repudiated, the widow was to put him to open shame. Ruth's marriage to Boaz is an illustration of this law. Boaz offered the opportunity of redemption to the nearest of kin, and upon his refusal, Boaz redeemed the inheritance himself (Ruth 4:1–10).

They asked Jesus a very weird question which we do not really understand because we live in a totally different context. They are using an example whereby 7 brothers with no heir marry one widow, asking Jesus if there is a resurrection to which brother will she then belong to in the life hereafter!

They are off course referring to a story that existed in those days namely the story of a girl by the name of Sarah whose 7 bridegrooms died in the bride chamber because of an evil spirit who was jealousy in love with her. This story is in a Deuterocanonical book that is not in our Bibles namely the Jewish book of Tobit. The Jewish book of Tobit is one of several Deuterocanonical books of the Bible. It was received as canonical by the Council of Trent (1546) and is found in the Roman Catholic Bible, but it was never included in the Hebrew Old Testament and is placed with the Apocrypha by Protestants.

Jesus is answering them in two ways. First he answered them by means of a general belief in those days namely that people who died became angels and that angels would not "procreate". Secondly Jesus answers them by referring to Moses whom they believed said nothing of the resurrection of the dead. Jesus argues that God spoke to Moses at the burning bush as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God's faithfulness to his covenant demands that if he is their God after death, death is not the final word for them. One of the most common Jewish prayers of the period recites God's faithfulness to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as a living reality for their own time.

The reaction: well the Sadducees and the teachers of the Law had nothing else to say to Jesus.

The message: God is the God of the living! The resurrection is a living reality to everyone that is humble, who repents and believes the good news, whom God pronounces righteous.

Amen

Sermon

The text for the sermon: verse 38

“He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive.”

Have you ever been surprised?

I really hope so otherwise your life would be pretty boring!

I must say there are surprises that you would like to forget or pray that you never have them again. We call them “nasty surprises”. I am actually not thinking or speaking of them this morning. I am thinking of positive joyful surprises like the news that you were successful in a job application or a promotion at your work or a surprise holiday organised by your loved one. I think it is one of the most wonderful feelings that you can get when you are surprised. It is a feeling of joy that exceeds all expectations and all other emotions. It is an experience which you cannot define in words.

But have you ever thought of God as a God of surprises, a God who is alive and at work in our lives - A God who almost surprises us daily with his miracles of grace, mercy and love. A God whom we can never ever detain in a bottle and say this is God. A God that not even the grave could contain. - A living God at work through his Holy Spirit surprising us with his guidance, will and Almightyness.

It is as if we do not realize that we are serving a living God. A God who is by our sides day and night helping us along life’s pathways ultimate leading to his Heavenly kingdom where there will no more tears, sadness, pain, death and struggle. It is as if we seek God and look out for Him in the big things of life while missing the ordinary

daily miracles of life that happen all around us. I said on Thursday at the Break service that Henro almost forces me again and again to discover God's creation and life giving Spirit as we walk to his school. Every time as we walk to school he almost shouts out when he sees an ant that I hardly saw. When last did you really look at God's creation and when last were you surprised by the wonder of His creation?

But He is not only lively visible in nature. He is even lively visible in daily events. Time and time again I am surprised by God's timing and planning. Often I experience how I go to people at the right time knowing that God planned it all the way. People also often remark how God spoke to them here through the sermon and how surprised they were to hear that God was just speaking to them

I am sure you can tell just as many stories of God surprising you!

God is indeed a living reality. He surprises us time and time again through his life giving Spirit and presence even at times we never expected Him to be there! Maybe that is what Jesus wanted to say to the Sadducees. They were so full of their theories and ideas that they were not open to be surprised differently by God's Spirit. They were so set in their ways that they could not understand that God is greater than their ideas and knowledge. They closed themselves off to God's lively way to surprise them by His glorious resurrection in Jesus Christ. They did not only miss the greatest opportunity to new life but also the chance to be surprised by a living God who cares for his children even after they have died.

May we go out of this church and just have faith in the God who surprises us daily with his gifts of love, care, peace and hope. May we never ever lose our ability to be surprised by the greatness of God as He holds us all in his fatherly hand.

Amen