

LUKE 20:27-38 THE GOING FROM THE WORLD WE KNOW NOV. 11, 01

AIM: To look at this curious text that approaches the question of resurrection in a way quite foreign to us and to ground the issue in our lives in terms of yearning, hope and finally, how the issues is left to the nature of the God we experience in our lives.

INTRODUCTION

Do any of you know who Studs Terkel is? How do you know him? Through most of my life there were several people who were the embodiment of the city that I knew and cared about, Chicago; Mayor Daley, Sol Alinski, Koko Taylor, Steve Goodman, Herb Cupcinet, Mike Royko, and Studs Terkel. I first encountered Studs in a TV show that ran in Chicago in the early days called Studs Place. Studs Place was a Chicago neighborhood bar and Studs Terkel played the owner and bar tender. He also had an interview show on WFMT the classical music station in Baltimore. He had this show before such shows were so popular. He interviewed all kinds of people. I remember him interviewing Madeline Murray O'Hare and as long as he kept her off her hobby horse, she was revealed to be an interesting and sometimes thoughtful person.

Studs is an oral historian. He won the Pulitzer Prize for a book he did on World War 11, actually done many years before the renaissance in interest in WW 11. He does extensive interviews with people. All kinds of people. He will interview the famous and the nobodys of the world. And he will, by patience and attention, get them to express as best they can, their most fundamental ideas, beliefs, experiences and convictions. I read his book, *Working*, a terrific book of interviews with people who spoke about the work they did. I remember the interview with a woman who was a waitress in one of those endless, ordinary, neighborhood restaurants. She spoke with passion about what she did and what delight she took from serving the patrons who came into the place.

Studs Terkel's wife died two years ago. When she died he began a new book. He started doing interviews with people about death. His work must not be understood as the same as polling. Studs tends to stay with the people who live in Chicago and he likes to include some of the famous that he knows, like Gore Vidal. The book was reviewed in *The Washington Post* a couple of weeks ago. The reviewer was David Heim, Editor of the *Christian Century*, a religious journal. In his review Heim observes "...this collection indicates that Americans are left to develop their own vocabularies and concepts for approaching death. It suggests, furthermore, that Americans doubt that the Big Questions have any plausible answers." He also notes, "For most people, the hunger for a faith is rarely expressed or satisfied in traditional religious terms."

The point is confirmed by our experience of the recent weeks in the long, huge wave of aftermath of September 11. There is a peak of opposition to the United States and its policy through the Middle East, and it is done so in the interest of Islam, and the gathering of allies around the aim of the United States to rid the world of terrorism and those who give aid and comfort to them, gather around other values and interests beside

religious ones. But, whether religious or not, the issue of death in our lives and how one is to think about it and how one has faith in the face of it, is persistent and important. This issue is raised in this text.

THE TEXT

1. **CONTEXT.** This episode appears in all three synoptic gospels and it appears in the same context. This episode occurs after Jesus has entered the city of Jerusalem, the event we celebrate as Palm Sunday. In rapid succession there are conflicts with the leadership of the religious establishment. The Pharisees urge Jesus to rebuke his disciples for the way they greeted him on the entrance to the city. The leaders seek ways to destroy him. The leaders challenge Jesus on the authority by which he does what he does. The leaders seek to “lay hands on him”, but they are fearful of the crowds. The leaders believe that Jesus tells the people parables against them. They send spies to listen to what he says.

In our text, the Sadducees approach Jesus. This group is part of the leadership, but they have disputes with the Pharisees. One of the disputes is about resurrection. The Sadducees are very conservative. They believe that the belief and practice of the Jews must be confined to what is reported in the first five books of the Bible; the books of Moses. Others believe that the tradition of the Psalms and the prophets and the oral tradition were a part of the past upon which faith and practice were rooted.

It is hard to see this encounter between Jesus and the Sadducees to be of the same character as that with the Pharisees or leaders. They seek to get rid of him. The Sadducees seem to seek only to engage in an intellectual argument with him.

2. The accounts of this episode in Matthew, Mark and Luke, are the same in the way they report the question that is brought to Jesus, virtually identical. The argument of the Sadducees is based on a law declared in Deut. There is a law that says, if a man marries and dies before and his wife have children, it is necessary for a brother to the man to take the wife as his wife and have children for his brother. From what I read, this has to do with the integrity of the inheritance of the man. The question posed to Jesus based upon the law of Moses, was as follows. If the oldest of seven brothers takes a wife and dies before he has a child, and the brother next in age takes her as his wife, dies and does not have a child, and this continues until all the brothers have married the woman and she has born none of them a child, whose wife would she be in the resurrection?

There argument is, the Law of Moses is assumed as basic, it does not advocate resurrection, and if resurrection is proposed and the law is to be followed, one ends in absurdity.

3. While all the accounts state the question the same and attribute it to Sadducees, the way in which Jesus answers is a little different. In Mark and Matthew, Jesus answer begins with the observation that the Sadducees know neither scripture nor the power

of God. Luke leaves this out. All contain the declaration that in the resurrection people neither marry nor are given in marriage for they are like angels. In Mark and Luke, the answer of Jesus appeals to the passage of Moses before the burning bush. Matthew leaves out this reference, but in all Jesus declares that God is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and that God is the God of the living, not of the dead.

11. GOING FROM THE WORLD WE KNOW.

The question of resurrection deals with two very different and real things in our experience as human beings, whether religious or not. First, it deals with the way we live life and the issues that get raised for us as we live our lives. Secondly, it deals with the nature of that over against which we live our lives, that which enters our world and manifests itself in the world and to us at the deepest level of our lives. Death and resurrection are raised by these aspects of the existence of every human being.

1. Human life in this world. Our existence is indeed a curious things. E.O Wilson, the great Harvard biologist has observed in his book on the evolutionary and biological roots of all disciplines and activities of human beings, individually and culturally, that despite what he believes, human beings seem to experience their life in the world as alienated from that in which we are destined to live. He also finds it curious that human beings cannot live their lives without what he calls the “illusion of freedom.” Our experience of living in the world discloses to us that that for which our hearts yearn cannot be fully and continuously realized in our lives. At each point along our journey there seems that which our hearts and consciousness intuits is meant for us, but which is always on the horizon, and like the mountains toward which we travel, while seeing them, they always seem to exist far away from us. Seeing such things on the horizon is the well from which springs hope. We cannot not make our way from one day to the next without hope, and our hope is grounded in that which never seems to draw closer to us, never seems to be available to us in any specific moment of our lives. And we know, from our experience, that even if an approximation of what we anticipate should be realized, it would be tarnished and would slip away. How is it that our lives our lived in this paradox?. As one theologian writes, **“For how foolish it is to long for a future that, first, always remains uncertain and, second, even at best---namely, when it is really fulfilled---only brings on nearer the grave.”** We cannot live without hope of there being that which meets our deepest yearnings, and at the same time we know from hard and bitter experience that what is yearned for will not and cannot be realized in life lived in this, the only world we have. It is from this strange structure of the life of every human being that resurrection springs. Our hope is that this fragile things we are, with these deep running yearnings and dreams, reflects something on the other side of the horizon we know is before us, our own deaths and the deaths of those we love.

What we know about our own lives is reflected in what Jesus declares to those with whom he is so intimate, the poor and outcast of his time and place. We have noted often in these sermons the last few weeks, that a part of what Jesus declares to those mired in

misery is that there will come a time of realization and reversal. We have read the story of the Rich man and Lazarus and how it is Lazarus who dwells in the bosom of Abraham, and there those deep needs and yearnings that swelled in his broken life on earth are realized.

2. THE NATURE OF THE ONE WE HAVE KNOWN

Jesus suggests to the Sadducees who address him that they do not know the nature of God and that God is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, He is the God of the living and not the dead.

When dealing with death and resurrection, we are not left solely with ourselves. As Jesus suggested, there is that which is other than us, from which we have come and towards which we journey that is to be considered. Indeed, it is hard to think of ourselves as other than on a journey. For some of our lives our eyes are cast to what can be realized. We worry about our children when they are young for fear that they will rush to head long into what they believe the future holds for them. We all know, from our own experience, that the visions and hopes of the young for what lay ahead are uninformed hopes and can lead them into dead ends. For some of our lives we are in the midst of what we hoped and planned for and we find that it might be of some satisfaction, but it is also the very shape and weight of the burden we must carry. For some of us, we remember where we have been and think of what it is that is on the other side of the horizon. But we have not asked for this life, and we did not ask to be creatures who die, and we are nothing other than the creatures who must bear this.

But there comes into our lives those moments when we are caught by The Other. We have moments when beauty discloses itself to us in music, or words, or the shape of landscape. We have moments when, in the midst of family or community, we experience that we are welcomed to a place, that there are those who will see to it we are protected and cared for, that our efforts have been gladly received and responded to. We have moments when that mystery which lurks on the other side of all things, picks something out of the infinite detail of the world, to make itself known to us in terms of what it is and discloses that we, who we are, what we have been, what is deepest within us, is known and embraced with the embrace of a parent for a beloved child.

Last Sunday evening was an important event for me. Standing before those who gathered there and trying to say something about those clusters of events in which who I am was forged and to which I cling as the substance of my life, and know that they are this because of what was at work in them, and to look down and see my daughter looking at me, listening, and thinking, “perhaps she sees me differently now, perhaps she sees me as someone who has come this far and had grand and beautiful things happen to him and perhaps she sees that she is among those grand and beautiful things that has happened to me. And if that is so, I am filled with joy!”.

God is the God of the living. This God, whom has made himself known to us in transcendent experiences and affirmations, is the Horizon and what is on the other side of the Horizon and this God has attached us to himself and in life and in death, that attachment will not be let go of.

It is important that this is not a matter of something we can know. It is a matter of faith, a matter of a hope that we carry within us all the days we live and we carry within us as we draw near to the death which marks us like a scare on our cheeks. Those who suggest to us that because this is in the Bible, and therefore it is known with certainty, deny the power of death in our lives. They deny the grief that we have experienced the last two months and more importantly, they would deny with callousness the grief of those who have lost loved husbands, wives, children or parents in the WTC attack. It is a cruel act done out of fearfulness of facing what we must all face who live in this world; that we are mortal beings who know our mortality.

Amen