

Proper 27, Year "C": Job 19:23-27a; Psalm 17:1-8; 2 Thess 2:1-5, 13-17; Luke 20:27-38

Title: Pay Attention to the Concert Master

The question put to Jesus by the Sadducees had to do with a succession of brother's and their obligation to marry their deceased brother's widow. The question, as you are probably aware was intended to entrap Jesus in a confusing or circular loop of reasoning that would ultimately discredit him. But Jesus was use to these little pop quizzes and to my knowledge he never failed one.

There are many examples of such questions that the Jewish leaders of his day would periodically put to Jesus. None were intended to do Jesus any good. None of these questions were posed in an honest effort to seek enlightenment from an enlightened teacher. Yet, that is, in fact what they got. And we, by way of the Bible, are the beneficiaries of these little exchanges between Jesus and those who would attempt to trip him up so to speak.

And so the pop quiz this morning rests on an Old Testament mandate that if a mans brother dies leaving his widow childless, it was the surviving brother's obligation to marry his deceased brother's widow. This all had to do with addressing certain issues related to a man's lineage not continuing as a result of departing this world having left no heir. So again, in the culture of that day, and indeed it's right there in the rule book called Leviticus, if your brother dies not having left an heir it would be your responsibility as the surviving brother to marry his widow.

Well, what if the brother were already married you might ask? Well, minor detail. Not a problem. In that culture, two wife's were considered much better than one anyway.

So, what does Jesus do with this trick question? Well, he does what he most often did with trick questions. He ignored it. And he *used it* as an opportunity to make a point that he thought was worth making. Or maybe to answer a question that was not asked, yet which deserved an answer.

So, what was the question Jesus answered that was not asked? It was this. The question Jesus answered was: Master, tell us what things it is important for us to be concerned about? What are matters of eternal relevance and what are not? What are questions of ultimate importance and what questions, although maybe interesting or even intriguing, are better left to a game of Trivial Pursuit?

Ah, now Jesus was in His element. Jesus would answer *that* question.

In effect Jesus says, "Good question, but the problem is you're thinking in three dimensional terms. You assume that things in heaven will be just like things are here on earth. You assume the models, the paradym, the physics are the same. You assume that just because two plus two equals four here in this realm, two plus two will also equal four in heaven. Maybe. Maybe not. Maybe two plus two in heaven equals five. Or maybe two plus two in heaven equals some number you've never heard of.

The point is, marriage and marital relationships are part and parcel of what it means to be human. In fact, it can be a very important aspect of the human experience. But for reasons that you cannot now know, marriage will have no place in heaven. Those who are resurrected neither marry nor are given in marriage. They are like angels. Children of God.

This is the best Jesus could do in an attempt to describe the resurrected life because language fails us. Earthly concepts just don't serve our understanding of such things. Mystery, true Mystery, the Mystery of God, goes beyond our ability to conceive. Maybe that's why it's called, "mystery."

Concepts like 'resurrection' and 'heaven' defy literalization. As a state of being, such concepts are ultimately beyond earthly language and human understanding. And they go beyond all earthly attachments. The resurrected life is a wholly new and unparalleled state of being gifted to us by God.

That, in essence, is Jesus' answer to the unasked question.

A point worth noting I think is that the apostle Paul makes a stab at imagining and describing heaven when he makes a distinction between physical bodies and spiritual bodies. But I think the most important thing Paul had to say about heaven was what he said to the Corinthians when he said, "Except for love, all things such as we know them will pass away. But love -- Love you will recognize." (1 Cor 13:8)

Agape love. Love that asks nothing in return. Love that is unmotivated by personal needs, and is not restricted to the small core that I consider lovable. Something like that you can imagine. And something like that will be part of the fabric of heaven, says Paul.

All of this brings to my mind one Mr. Jonas. Mr. Jonas was a madman. Mr. Jonas was my high school band director. I remember one time, for example, the band was practicing marching down the football field. It was a Tuesday morning just before lunch. It had rained the night before and so there were mud puddles on the field. Lots of mud puddles and big ones too. Consequently, the band members were tending to march all

around the puddles which seems a reasonable enough thing to do except that marching around puddles makes for some very crooked lines of marching youngsters.

General Patton would not have approved, and neither did Mr. Jonas.

Mr. Jonas was not happy. In fact, he was furious. We heard Mr. Jonas' whistle and looked up to see him ascending from the top row of bleachers which had been his vantage point—and he was coming down two bleachers at a time. We also saw him leap over, or I should say, attempt to leap over a railing to the football field a few feet below. He tripped and went to the ground. But not for long. He sprang back up and rushed over red faced to a big mud puddle, right in the middle of a hundred or so wide-eyed high school musicians. And he jumped up and down in that mud puddle screaming that to march through a mud puddle would not kill you. “See! See! See!” he shouted.

Mr. Jonas was truly a madman. We all knew it. But we also all knew that he was a truly great band teacher and we all very much appreciated and respected him.

I bring this up only to introduce Mr. Jonas and to say that he had an annoying habit of desiring that during concert season, you as a musician, were to watch his baton so that you might have some *inkling* of the tempo that he desired for a given piece of music. To *ignore* Mr. Jonas, to attempt to set your own tempo would, well, let us just say could lead to some unpleasant consequences, consequences that could just about ruin your whole day.

Jesus had a message. He brought a message that he desires we pay attention to. Jesus would be delighted if we looked up once in while as we go marching through this life to get some inkling of the tempo that he suggests; live some inkling of the life God would have us live and the way he would have us live it.

Those who asked the trick questions of Jesus. Those who asked the questions which were tantamount to how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. They were not listening to Jesus. At best they were just confused about what questions to ask. At worse, they were not really interested in Jesus' answer to their questions. They were not interested in Jesus' tempo. They were marching to the beat of their own drummer. The religious leaders who were part of this crowd would challenge Jesus or anyone else who questioned their authority.

The people of Jesus' day would have done well to have let Jesus lead. They would have done well to have listened to the Concert Master. They would have done well to have looked up once in a while. They would have done well to have listened rather than to have maybe talked so much. To have opened themselves up to some instruction – instruction that if given half a chance might lead to an expanding of their theological thinking and broadened theological horizons.

And they and we do well to begin to imagine, along with Jesus, possibilities for our lives that heretofore maybe seemed – well, unimaginable.

And they and we are invited to imagine along with Jesus a world that is in cooperation with God's will for us. And they and we are invited to imagine along with Jesus a world that is in harmony with the intentions of creator God, a Peaceable Kingdom -- a world and a way of being that is so marvelous, so full of love, and so devoid of hatred and violence, and shameful things that our current world pales in comparison.

They would have done well to have imagined along with Jesus. And they would have done well to have looked up and found *His* tempo rather than insisting on their own.

And we do well to do likewise.

Amen.