

Introductory

This text has parallels in Matthew (22:23-33) and Mark (12:18-27). None of them are appointed to be read in the TLH one-year lectionary. Matthew and Mark are not appointed to be read in the LW or LSB three-year lectionary, but LW appoints this text (27-38) to be read on Pentecost 25A. It is curious that LW omits those two verses (39-40).

When Paul was on trial before the Sanhedrin, and he noted that the august body was made up of both Pharisees and Sadducees, he sought to drive a wedge between the two groups in the hope that it would help his cause to divide and conquer them. There, Luke notes that the Sadducees said that there is “no resurrection, no angel, and no spirit;”

But, Luke says, “the Pharisees acknowledge them all.” The Pharisees were the Jewish religious conservatives of the day, and the Sadducees were the Jewish religious liberals of the day, and if we speak in that sort of language our people will understand the concept. If they won’t, then it’s about time you did some ‘splaining so they do.

I have in the past and may in the future even refer to the first group as the LCMS of the day, and the other group as the ELCA of the day, and in a remarkable case of how the more things change, the more they stay the same...what does ELCA believe about those three teachings; the resurrection, angels, and the Holy Spirit?

This text addresses marriage in a way that will make a lot of Americans uncomfortable. The first awkward thing about marriage is that, in the time of Jesus, nuptials were arranged; the father of a son and the father of a daughter would decide that their children were to be married. I don’t know if we can know for sure if, or how often the children were consulted.

The second awkward thing is that Jesus points out that the primary purpose of marriage is to produce children, which it is, and the marriages service in LSB confirms that procreation is indeed one of several purposed for marriage. This is not as common of an idea as it used to be, and you may need to do some educating on this point.

It wasn't just the Jewish fathers who arranged marriages. Pretty much every culture and society that has ever existed has followed a similar practice, and in many parts of the world today the practice continues as a matter of course. The notable exception to that rule of mankind is the Christian West, and our expulsion of that age-old practice is rather recent.

We read Luther admonishing fathers to consult with their children before they choose their spouses for them, and when Katherine Von Bora and the other nuns came over from the convent to Wittenberg, they famously did not start dating, but Luther acted in the role of father to these fatherless women and selected a mate for each of them.

In the article on Arranged Marriage, WIK says that "it was the norm until the 18th century," and you can make the argument that things were better when such was the norm. Rather than having people whose brains have not completely developed "fall in love" with an acquaintance of a complete stranger, the adults in the room would work it out.

But I don't think we're going back. The way it is now, a few years ago, Jim Ryun, the runner, then Congressman from Kansas and Evangelical Christian, shook some people up when he talked about arranging the marriage of his daughter. Other responses were more severe and critical, and some were downright nasty. Can society not connect the dots?

As we have progressively abandoned the universal practice of arranging marriage, family turmoil, divorce, et al have progressively risen. So, you want to know what I have done about it? Save for seriously joking with friends about arranging marriages between our children, which is generally met with blank stares, we have done nothing.

Probably because of the blank stares. Fact of the matter is that it takes two fathers to Tango, and I can't arrange marriages for other peoples' children, and I'm pretty sure that my own children would have rejected such an arrangement. As for myself, before I asked my wife to marry me, I asked my father, and the men who married my daughters asked me.

As far as encouraging my people to do that, I may or may not mention the practice in the sermon on this text, and I will teach it when we come to verses like this in Adult Bible Class, to be met by blank stares. So their children, like your children, with very few exceptions in modern society, choose whom they will and we go with it.

You don't have to be a Biologist to see that the purpose of marriage; the joining together of a man and a woman, is to bring children into the world. The male libido and the female mothering drive are two of the most powerful impulses in humans, and because of that, humans have seldom been at a loss for children, and our race is very sustainable.

In the Bible, and in human history, the more children, the better, especially if they were males. Both societal and individual common sense have historically noted the obvious; more of us is a good thing, for a variety and a plethora of reasons, and fewer of us is a thing to be avoided at all costs, and it's not a bad idea to actually have a cushion of children.

That is, until the Enlightenment, and humans drunk on their own reason began to do really stupid things, and for the first time in human history we may have societies who are choosing to eliminate themselves in a collective ethnic suicide. The Europeans were already well on their collective way to that, even before immigration sped it up.

In his book *America Alone*, Mark Steyn, among other things runs the numbers – birth rates – and does the math, and the numbers say the Spanish and Italians are killing themselves by their utter refusal to reproduce. The French are not far behind and the rest of Europe, and there may come a time when the Christian West is identified as America alone.

He notes that it is the modernized, liberalized Christians, who do not want to waste precious time and money on children, but would rather spend on self, while at the same time Muslim immigrants are multiplying like – well like normal human beings. In democratic countries where the majority rules...if things continue like they are, it's only a matter of time.

I talk to people around Grand Mound, Iowa all the time who are from families approaching, in some cases exceeding double digits, and who had a lot of offspring themselves. Not so much these days, and if you're wondering why there aren't as many people in church as there used to be, and why we see so much gray hair and hear so few crying babies...

So, what are you going to do? Tell people to have more babies? That would be a good start, but I would approach that subject carefully, picking my spots. Pre-Marital counseling would be a good spot, and maybe making mention of the sine qua non (without which) of understanding what Jesus says here about marriage and heaven.

We can speak of children as a blessing, and not a burden, and people don't often hear that. In fact, we've gone from that to children are just okay to children are a burden to all these children are destroying the planet! If you've been paying even mild attention, there are Americans who consider it morally wrong to have children. Some of them are in Congress.

Birth control has certainly changed a lot of things. Fundamentally, birth control has made it possible to talk about how many children you would have. When getting pregnant was the worst thing that could happen to a young single girl, and the only way to keep from getting pregnant was to not have sex, young girls did a lot more abstaining from sex.

And once you take procreation as the purpose of it out of the marriage picture, you get a really screwed up society. It doesn't happen overnight, but it has happened incredibly quickly. In 2013, in rural eastern Iowa, the divorced woman clergy person married the church organist to his live-in male lover in the church. And it was a Lutheran Church.

Nor Missouri Synod. When you remove procreation as the primary purpose of marriage, then marriage becomes about other things, and in the case of “gay marriage,” procreation is the last thing it’s about. But you can’t beat Biology and the Laws of Nature. People openly wonder “what’s next” for the church that allows such things. More deviancy.

This incident, recorded in all three Synoptics, is often cited as evidence that there will be no marriage in heaven. Indeed, in the vows we promise to stay together “until death do us part.” But I don’t think I’d take it any farther than that and say that husbands and wives won’t recognize each other as spouse in heaven or even recognize each other at all.

I have been cleaving to the same woman for forty-one years, and I hope to enjoy a few more years of that cleavage, and I have a hard time getting my head around the idea that we will be strangers in heaven. The point that Jesus is making here, and that Paul talks about extensively in First Corinthians, is that heaven will be a place of altered states.

Included are altered bodies, and relationships. There will be no need for marriage, because there will be no need to bring forth a new generation, because there is no death in heaven. I think I will feel comfortable talking about there being no marriage in heaven, but that there will be something far superior to what is the pretty good institution of marriage.

The setting is Jerusalem after the Triumphal Entry, the cleansing of the Temple, the Parable of the Vintner, and discussion on paying taxes to Caesar. Since He has come into the center of the Jewish Religious Establishment, Jesus has done nothing but antagonize them, and the Sadducees apparently think that it’s about time for a push back, and they do.

Textual Notes

27. Your people have heard of the Sadducees, and probably remember something about them. Teach them something new about the Sadducees, and if you don’t have anything new to teach them, then go ahead and learn something so that you can do that. As usual, WIK is a good starting point, and then the Jewish Encyclopedia, then Christian resources.

Certain of them “τῶν Σαδδουκαίων – The Sadducees” approached Jesus and engage Him in theological discussion. The Sadducees taught a lot of things, but Luke notes their teaching on the Resurrection; “οἱ ἀντιλέγοντες ἀνάστασιν μὴ εἶναι, ἐπηρώτησαν αὐτὸν – they speak against the resurrection, that it is not, they questioned Him.”

It is said of these Sadducees that they “ἀντιλέγοντες – spoke against” resurrection. The verb is a compound word, made up of “ἀντι – against” and “λέγοντες – speaking,” and it is in the form of a present participle; they did not have a slip of the tongue or misspeak, but they said it all the time, and they meant it; it was part of their core teaching and belief.

The biblical witness tells us that the resurrection is not the only thing they didn’t believe; they didn’t believe in angels (messengers) or the (Holy) Spirit (Acts 23:8). Of resurrection they say, “μὴ εἶναι – there is not.” That’s the verb of being with a negator, and this is very strong language that indicates a very strong belief that such a thing simply does not exist.

The idea of a resurrection from the dead is not really all that profound, and many religions have by natural knowledge of God come to that belief. Of the “Abrahamic” religions, WIK says they believe in a bodily resurrection, and a brief perusal of the article on “resurrection” reveals that most religions believed in some form of it, at least from time to time.

The article also includes a sub-heading on “Zombies,” which got me to thinking. I’m a fan of AMC’s *The Walking Dead*. In that show, and other shows like that, people come back from the dead, and it isn’t pretty. It got me to wondering if that’s what some of our hearers think of when we talk about people coming back from the dead; that they’ll be “walkers.”

We don’t want them to think that Jesus rose as a Zombie on Easter Sunday, and we surely don’t want them thinking that’s what’s going to happen to us when we are raised up. Probably that’s not what they’re thinking about, but I think I’m going to stop taking for granted that my hearers know that Jesus rose as a man, perhaps clarifying as we go.

The OT certainly taught resurrection. In the OT, resurrection seems to be a thing for Elijah and Elisha. In 1 Kings 17:17-24, Elijah raises a young boy from the dead. Elisha raises the son of a Shunammite woman in 2 Kings 4:32-37, and when a dead man’s body was tossed into his grave, as soon as his bones touch those of Elisha, the man is resurrected.

Job’s famous words, read at the graveside, reflect his belief that even though worms would destroy his body in the grave, “yet in my flesh I will see” God. He then marvels at the thought. When the OT and OT personages talk about their ancestors as if they are still alive – and like God does to Moses today – bodily resurrection would not be a surprise. The Sadducees are reading the same OT as we are, and yet they have a strong belief against the idea of resurrection, one of several theological differences Paul notes (Acts 23:8) to distinguish them from Pharisees like him. How can this be, when all of these things are clearly taught in the OT? That seems like a rhetorical question, doesn’t it?

In Matthew’s account of this incident, He ties the false doctrine of the Sadducees to their view of the Bible; “You are wrong, because you know neither the Scripture nor the power of God” (22:29). I like the way Jesus in not so gentle terms declares to the ELCA of the day simply that you are wrong, and this is why you are wrong. Point taken, Jesus.

28. We already know that the people who ask this question about the family with an incredibly high mortality rate don't believe in the Resurrection. Knowing that unbelief, their question is not asked in the pursuit of knowledge. Rather, they are the university religion professor asking a question that the freshmen are supposed to find most profound.

Most of us would think it gross to marry the widow or our deceased brother, but in those days...the reference is from Deut. 25:5, and the purpose for the practice of which they speak is that the dead man's line would be carried on through the joining of his wife and his brother. In a sermon, I would say that, and that's all that I would say.

29 – 32. Unlike the classic movie, there was only one bride for seven brothers, and by this time your hearer – especially the women – is beginning to get just a little bit creeped out. In this hypothetical, it is extremely unlikely for seven men of marriageable age to die, and to seven times leave this poor hypothetical woman a widow, in this hypothetical.

And last, but surely not least, the woman died.

33. There was, it turns out, a question here, put like this; “ἡ γυνὴ οὖν ἐν τῇ ἀναστάσει τίνος αὐτῶν γίνεται γυνή – the woman, therefore, in the resurrection, of which of them will she be wife?” The gist of this is to help Jesus see that if you do believe in the resurrection, then that belief is going to – do you really want to open that can of worms?

Plowing on now, “οἱ γὰρ ἑπτὰ ἔσχον αὐτὴν γυναῖκα – for seven had her as wife.” So that's the question, and that's why they asked it, and Jesus has already (7:11-17) raised the son of the woman at Nain from the dead, He has raised Lazarus, and He has said that He Himself will be crucified, then rise from the dead, and He has said it three times.

We might see their question as an attack on the doctrine of resurrection by means of sarcasm, and as a direct personal attack on the words and acts of Jesus, who has raised people, and who has said of Himself that He will rise. It's the kind of question that a “Christian” who doesn't believe in the Resurrection, or is not sure, would ask.

You might ask – and I have been asked – how can somebody be a Christian who doesn't believe in the Resurrection, which has always been seen as one of the basic tenets of the Christian religion, and it still is. But a lot of “Christians” in America have their own brand of Christianity, and things like Resurrection may be seen as unimportant.

34. He then talks about “Οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου – the sons of this age,” a phrase that occurs in exactly the same way in 16:8, where He talks about the shrewd manager, and contrasts him to “τοὺς υἱοὺς τοῦ φωτός – the sons of light.” A few verses down the road, the sons of this age are contrasted to sons of God and sons of the Resurrection (36)

These are not complimentary words, and like in the case of the manager, they ought to be seen as a descriptive telling of the way things observably are; sons of this age “γαμοῦσιν καὶ γαμίσκονται – marry and are married.” Both verbs are in the present tense; the first is in the active mood, and the second is in the passive, so often translated “given in marriage.”

In the practice of the day, a practice that has endured for most of human history, and has fallen almost entirely into disuse in the Christian West, which has by far the highest divorce rate in all of human history, marriages were arranged, and a father would “give” his daughter in marriage. Sometimes the children were involved in marriage discussions.

35. Having spoken of “this age,” He now talks about another “age,” and He means heaven. He speaks of “οἱ δὲ καταξιωθέντες τοῦ αἰῶνος ἐκείνου τυχεῖν – those worthy to obtain that age.” The first verb is the passive participial form of “καταξιοῦω,” a word that appears only three times, the other two (Acts 5:41, 2 Thess. 1:5) in connection with suffering.

Worthy they are “τυχεῖν καὶ τῆς ἀναστάσεως τῆς ἐκ νεκρῶν – to obtain the resurrection from the dead” The verb “τυγχάνω – to obtain” is in the aorist tense, emphasis on the act, and occurs eleven other times in the NT, often to refer to an unusual or supernatural thing. What could be more extraordinary than dead people coming back to life in the resurrection?

Those who have obtained this don’t marry. There will be no marriage as we know marriage in heaven. In terms of Logic, the major premise of the Sadducees is that there will be marriage in heaven and task Jesus to come up with the answer to their question. In terms of Logic, Jesus tells them that their premise is wrong, and therefore so is their question.

Other examples of this sort of thing; the child asks if he can get a sundae when we go to McDonalds today; the mother says we’re not going to McDonalds today. The man asks his friend if he and his wife are going to fly to Florida or drive in January; the man answers that we’re going to Hawaii this January. The false premise makes both questions moot.

36. By the way, while we’re on the subject, there’s a reason why there is no marriage in heaven. According to the LSB marriage service, one of several purposes of marriage is to produce children, and to propagate the human race, which dies off every generation. There will be no death in heaven, and therefore there will be no need for marriage and procreation.

Here it is put in these terms; “οὐδὲ γὰρ ἀποθανεῖν ἔτι δύνανται – because nobody is able to die” in heaven. The conjunction “γὰρ” is often used when an explanation of a previous statement is coming, like here. To put it in terms of the complete inability of people to die places that age in stark contrast to this age, where people are unable to live.

And here come those more words of explanation, “ἰσάγγελοι γὰρ εἰσιν – because they are like the angels,” in heaven, in this regard. Angels do not procreate, nor do they die, and we have no record of angels marrying or giving in marriage or of them having marital relations, and such is also the case for humans in heaven, in this regard.

The first word in that phrase is a compound noun, and a hapax in the NT, although the first word in the compound is part “ἰς,” a shortened form of “ἴσος,” which occurs eight times in the NT. It is used to compare one thing to another, and there are many things on this earth that will not be the same as they are in heaven, a point that bears repetition.

What we will be then is described as “καὶ υἱοὶ εἰσιν Θεοῦ τῆς ἀναστάσεως υἱοὶ ὄντες – Sons of God they are, being sons of the Resurrection.” Both verbs are in the present tense; the first is a simple present tense, and the second is a present participle. Keeping with the subject heading of family relationships, all who are in heaven are children of God.

37. And now, as is His wont, Jesus takes their smart-aleck question and turns it into an opportunity to make an apologia for the idea of Resurrection from the dead, in which the Sadducees do not believe. He quotes from Exodus 3:6, where God tells Moses that He is the God of the father of Moses, and of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

God would never have called himself the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, if these patriarchs, after their short lives, had become mere crumbling dust. God cannot be the God of a being who does not exist (Pulpit Commentary).

Jesus Himself says as much in Mark’s account (12:27.)

38. He then makes the simple assertion of something known to the Natural Man by Natural Knowledge; “Θεὸς δὲ οὐκ ἔστιν νεκρῶν – God is not of the dead,” then adds emphatically, “ἀλλὰ ζώντων – but of the living,” an active participle; we live now, in this age, and we will keep on living forever, in that age, two ages, one life lived in different spheres.

Using the same conjunction He used in verse thirty-six, and for the same purpose He says “πάντες γὰρ αὐτῷ ζῶσιν – because to all He (gives) life.” That last phrase is an ellipsis; “the omission of a word or phrase necessary for a complete syntactical construction but not necessary for understanding” (thefreedictionary.com). The phrase is missing a verb.

The thing about ellipsis is that the word left out has to be very obvious. The phrase “fire when ready” is an ellipsis whose meaning is clear; it means “fire when **you are** ready.” Likewise, the meaning of this ellipsis is clear; God **gives** life to all. This construction, and this use of the dative case (αὐτῷ - He) in this way is not uncommon in the NT.

Yet, incredibly, almost every English translation I’m looking at says something like all “live to Him.” What does that mean? Or more to the point, what do those words out of the mouth of Jesus have to do with making an apologia for the Resurrection, which is what He’s doing. But the phrase “God gives life to all” is patently true as well as understandable.

39. The people conversing now shift from “Sadducees” to “Scribes,” and they were likely the same people. Outside of the change in moniker, there is no reason to believe that this is a new group of people, and there is no break in the conversation. In fact, the way the two nouns are set in juxtaposition to one another...they are the same people.

Pharisees could be as well priests, scribes, nobility and other things all at the same time, and so could the Sadducees. To call them “Scribe” draws attention to their expertise as Bible Scholars, and here the Scribes like what Jesus is doing with this. Some of them, at and they commend Jesus, saying “Διδάσκαλε, καλῶς εἶπας – teacher, you speak well,”

Having said that, in only a few verses from now (45ff.), Jesus warns the people against “the Scribes, who like to go about in long robes...” You almost get the idea here that the men who commended Jesus do so – at least in part – to get on His good side. The warning to come says it takes more than that – like dump your false doctrine – to dwell on that side.

40. Luke concludes, “οὐκέτι γὰρ ἐτόλμων ἐπερωτᾶν αὐτὸν οὐδέν – no longer did they dare to ask Him anything.” The verb that I have translated “dare” means that they were scared to ask Jesus any more questions, and a quick perusal of the synoptics confirms that they did not. He embarrassed them. He made them look bad, those Bible scholars.

Sermon Titles

One Bride for Seven Brothers

Marriage in Heaven?

That’s a Bad Question

Hymns

Anything from the *Easter* section of LSB

Rev. Steven L. Anderson, Pastor
Immanuel Lutheran Church
Grand Mound, Iowa

Resources

ACC – Arthur A. Just Jr, Editor, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Luke)*. Intersociety Press, 2003

BAG – Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Translated by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, University of Chicago Press, 1979

BCLY – William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*. The Westminster Press, 1975

FGG – James W. Voelz, *Fundamental Greek Grammar*. Concordia Publishing House, 1993

MGM – W.F. Moulton, A.S. Geden, H.K. Moulton, *A Concordance to the Greek Testament*. T & T Clark LTD., 1978

MM – James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1982

ODCC – F.L. Cross, Editor, *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. Oxford University Press, 1978

RSV – Revised Standard Version of the Bible. Zondervan Publishing House, 1965

UBD – Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, Moody Press, 1977.

WP – Word Pictures in the New Testament, A.T. Robertson

VINE – W.E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, William White, Jr., *An Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984

WIK – www.wikipedia.com

BIB – www.biblos.com

GBO – www.greekbible.com

Digital Classics Library - www.perseus.tufts.edu

Internet Classics Library – www.classics.mit.edu

Christian Classics Ethereal Library - www.ccel.org

Project Wittenberg - www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/wittenberg-home.html