

## Sermon – 7<sup>th</sup> November 2010 – Pentecost 24 – Luke 20: 27-38

Text: Luke 20: 38 “Now he is God not of the dead but of the living: for to him all of them are alive.”

Background: - The question concerning resurrection.

Between 200 and 100 BC Pharisees and Sadducees disagreed over belief in resurrection when they emerged as opposed divisions within Judaism. According to Sadducees, there was neither a doctrine of resurrection of the dead nor belief in angels in the written Torah of the Hebrew Scriptures, the first five books of the Old Testament – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

Pharisees, on the other hand, emphasizing that the written Torah must be kept up to date with oral Torah, namely ongoing streams of interpretation handed down by word of mouth, co-ordinated with written Torah where new beliefs had emerged in prophetic literature and the Psalms, had a different view. Of special significance was acceptance by the Pharisees of the book of Daniel, which blended traditions of wisdom and prophecy with the new tradition of apocalyptic belief that emerged around 200BC. Daniel not only features the angels Gabriel and Michael, but also presents the earliest clear biblical reference to resurrection of the dead in the context of a final judgement to everlasting life or everlasting contempt – hell.

Jesus adopted updated apocalyptic beliefs characteristic of Pharisees and participated in the debates of the day around resurrection.

### The Text

In Luke 20: 27-33, Jesus is baited by the Sadducees with a totally unrealistic scenario about a woman who outlives seven husbands and then dies. This imaginary scenario is meant to make fun of Jesus and his position on the resurrection which they obviously knew about. Never-the-less, Jesus takes them seriously and uses the opportunity for some teaching of his own. Jesus’ basic point is that after death there will be no marriage and people won’t be given in marriage for it is an entirely different situation. For they are now like angels, children of God, and will remain so forever (vss 34-36).

What Jesus points out to the Sadducees is that eternal life is not simply a continuation of mortal life beyond death. The radical statement of the gospel is that in heaven there are no socio-political strata and this is the good news, even for us today. The story of Lazarus and the Rich Man from our readings the other week re-enforces this view. The mystery of the resurrection revealed by Jesus is that heaven is a place where those who have been de-humanised will be restored, those who have been oppressed will be set free; and those that have been treated as inferior will be raised up and called ‘beloved’. Women will no longer be the property of men, treated as

chattel – passed from one man to another at will and whim. Women will be children of God, able to give love and receive love as they see fit. This may not seem very revolutionary to us in our society today but in Jesus' time it was and in many cultures, even today, this is not the way it is. We forget our openness and freedoms within our society compared to so many parts of the world. Certainly some of our freedom comes through Christ and the Christian nature of our country and its form of government.

Jesus says in verse 38 that God 'is the God of the living' – that is the God of newness, forgiveness and liberation. Oppression on earth does not dictate the rewards of heaven. The resurrection is a new world with different realities beyond that of life on earth. Quite mind-boggling, even today. How do we interpret this?

Let me share a short story. Last week I listened to Professor Brian Schmid, an astrophysicist, from ANU. He spoke of the size of the universe and talked in billions of light years. I couldn't fathom the distances he was talking about – quite amazing to contemplate. He was incredibly excited about grey matter, black holes and whether the universe was expanding or contracting. This was all beyond my comprehension.

In many ways, as Jesus talks about the resurrection, there are many things that I don't understand. Jesus confounds the Sadducees with his arguing of and for the resurrection. Our God is a God of the living: past, present and future. The resurrection is not a continuation of our present lives in another realm. It is different with God's orientation ruling in all aspects of that place.

Even the Sadducees who disagreed with Jesus' viewpoint accepted his words: "Teacher, you have spoken well" and they dared not try to question him further.

Jesus certainly doesn't answer all our questions on the resurrection, even though we may wish he did. However, what he does is point us to a God whose faithfulness to those whom God has called is immeasurable and inexhaustible.

With the Psalmist we are called to: "Sing to the Lord a new song for

He has done marvellous things."

(Psalm 98:1a)

Let us pray.

Lord Jesus, Lord of Life, Victor over sin and death, give us the eyes to see your resurrection victory when it occurs in the world. Help us sense the reality of your resurrection, transforming our world, bringing life from death, hope from despair and joy from sorrow. Amen