

Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections
based on this week's lectionary readings

November 10, 2019

Proper 27C / Ordinary 32C / Pentecost +22

The readings this week:

- Haggai 1:15b-2:9
- Psalm 145:1-5, 17-21
- 2 Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17
- Luke 20:27-38

[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

To Sweet Impossible Blossom

"Indeed they cannot die anymore... being children of the resurrection."

It is these words of Jesus that cause my soul to catch; these my worn heart snags on.

In the gospel text this week, the Sadducees come with a theoretical question concerning a resurrection they don't believe in. Jesus knows their unbelief. Perhaps he knows he also won't convince them, even appealing to the Torah, as he does. But he still answers the question.

They've come up with the perfect quandary for Jesus. A woman marries seven brothers, gives not one of them a child to carry his name and tether her to him. In the resurrection, whose will she be?

It occurs to me that because of their denial of the resurrection they're asking about, they mean their question to be purely a matter of theory. It does seem a little absurd, this poor woman meeting the same tragedy seven times.

But in reading their question, I feel like I know her. She has a name and a story. After all, in the story of Jesus meeting the woman at the well, he draws it out of her that she has no husband, and then reveals further that she's had five husbands, and the man she's with now she isn't married to. In our culture where levirate marriage is something of the past, she's often painted as scandalous. But it seems that perhaps, she's only deeply unfortunate. Perhaps her husbands were all brothers, and the man she's with when Jesus finds her is the only way for her to go on living provided for. She's a woman existing emptily, seemingly barren-souled because of what tragedy has carved out of her.

Beyond the biblical account, I still feel like I know her. Life is often tragic, all around us. Sometimes our own lives are tragic, and we feel how every day brings us closer to our end, hollowing us out bit by bit. We can be owned by choices or circumstances outside of our control, or feel so depleted as to say we are barren.

The question the Sadducees pose has a deeper element than that of the mere existence of a resurrection. Whether they see it or not, embedded in their words is a question also about the character of the resurrection and the location of hope. For their theoretical woman's entire life, she has suffered being a burden on those who have dutifully provided for her, and in her barrenness, she has nothing to offer in return. If the life to come is only a parallel to or continuation of the life that is now, why would she want to

be resurrected? Could more of this present life possibly be hope?

It is that question that I see as the reason Jesus entertains their absurdities. She is a fiction they have created, but while her life doesn't factually exist, it exists in truth in the lives of so many others. Human life isn't immune to suffering and despair. The question he answers is one that most who honestly wrestle with the gospel at some point encounter: how is this message hope? Jesus says in so many words that the resurrection isn't just more of this life, but rather takes on the qualities implicit to shalom, for God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.

Indeed, they cannot die anymore.

In Li-Young Lee's poem entitled "From Blossoms," these words snag me in similar ways to how those of Jesus do:

*O, to take what we love inside,
to carry within us an orchard, to eat
not only the skin, but the shade,
not only the sugar, but the days, to hold
the fruit in our hands, adore it, then bite into
the round jubilation of peach.
There are days we live
as if death were nowhere
in the background, from joy
to joy to joy, from wing to wing,
from blossom to blossom to
impossible blossom, to sweet impossible blossom.*

Isn't that the Eucharist, taking what we love inside, and carrying within us the orchard? Isn't the resurrection that sweet impossible blossom we live toward?

In our gathering together with one another in communion, we feel the shape of hope. We pass peace, and shalom takes the shape of embrace and presence, the felt knowledge that we are not alone. We hold bread, we dip in the wine, these symbols that somehow represent the polar opposites of life and death in bodied form, telling the truth we live. We together, one body, body forth the shape of resurrection, as we are moving toward that culminating day on which our bodies will raise.

In our practices together as one body gathered, may we learn ever more to be children of the resurrection, moving in the space that is free from death, for Jesus has defeated it, and progress from joy to sweet impossible blossom. Amen.

~ an excerpt by Shannon Schaefer, [Ekklesia Project](#)

Reflecting on the Word



___ 1st Reading: [Haggai 1:15b-2:9](#)

Who is Haggai speaking to? What discouraged them to the point of stopping the building? What was the message? Why does the Bible stress the need for God's people to be strong and courageous? Is faith just about forgetting difficulties? What does he i.e. God say that might encourage them? How might the words 'My Spirit is abiding in your midst' make a big difference in their lives? How does the Lord encourage these disappointed believers? What importance does money have to God? Why does the Bible talk about 'giving' so often? What does God say that can bring hope to their building project? [Time for Truth](#)

___ Psalm Reading: [Psalm 145:1-5, 17-21](#)

If abundance is God's big idea, why do we seem more ruled by a scarcity mentality? Are the words of this psalm lovely thoughts, but irrelevant to how we order our lives, as individuals and as a community? Why do you think the psalms speak of God "destroying" some people? Do you think of happiness, and prosperity, as a reward for faithfulness? Do you believe there is "elemental generosity at the root of our human life"? Why or why not? [Weekly Seeds](#)



Praying Toward Sunday

A
place where
no squalls rage and
where flowers grow wild.
What can we bring along to that place?
Crutches, pain pills, tranquilizers?
How about our hearts?
Our spirit parts?
Lord,
is there some piece of us
that never dies?
A sacred
space in us
where love resides?
Oh widen
that inner space
while enough time remains.

Let our
human hearts
outflow now and always
with boundless,
infinite
love.

~ [Sunday Web Site](#)

The Heart of It

This really is the heart of it, isn't it?

They "neither marry nor are given in marriage."

Or try this:

"The latter splendor of this house shall be greater than the former."

"We will all be changed."

"They thought it was a ghost."

"Because I live, you also...."

Like a Sadducee,

I just can't wrap my head around any of this.

And maybe that's the point.

This God

...this word

...this news

...this love

Changes everything.

Most of all, my heart.

This really is the heart of it, isn't it?

~ Scott L. Barton, [Lectionary Poems](#)

___ 3rd Reading: [2 Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17](#)

What, from vv. 1-3, apparently, were the Thessalonians being tempted to feel and believe? How could the believers there possibly have thought that Jesus' return had already happened? What did Paul say must happen first, before the return of Jesus? What does the phrase "as the firstfruits" mean? Paul calls the gospel "our" gospel. Why do you think he would choose to use that possessive pronoun rather than merely saying, "the" gospel." To what is he referring? Why did God call our Thessalonian brothers and sisters? In what way do believers obtain the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ? In what ways do we today need to be reminded to stand firm? What temptations do we face in our culture that might draw us away from belief in the true gospel? What competing ideas could lure us, unawares?

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___ 4th Reading: [Luke 20:27-38](#)

Where do you look for hope for the future? Where do you rest your hope and dreams? In whom do you look to find your security? Who were the Sadducees and what were their beliefs? What does Jesus' response tell us about the resurrection life? What does this tell us about singleness and marriage? What difference does Jesus' teaching make to our perspective on growing old, pain, sickness and death? Read Paul's teaching on the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:12-21). Why is the doctrine of the resurrection so important? Read Phil. 3:10-11. What does it really mean to know Christ and the power of his resurrection in our life?

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