

Flourish in Faith *Stewardship Narrative Series*

Proper 27 - Luke 20: 27-38

Sunday, November 10, 2013

*Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living;
for to him all of them are alive.*



When I was a sophomore in college, I became a religion major. I studied the Hebrew scriptures and the New Testament from the perspective of a scholar. Or at least I thought I did. I needed for things to fit together, to line up. I wanted – and expected – explanations for miracles, healings and the Resurrection. I got caught up in the details, and for awhile they got in the way of my faith.

So when the Sadducees present Jesus with a rather bizarre case study of a widow who, obeying her obligation under Jewish law, marries each of her late husband's seven brothers in turn, each of whom subsequently dies – and ask Jesus whose wife will she be when she dies – I recognize them as the sophomores of scriptural interpretation.

As does Jesus. The Sadducees have tied themselves up into theological pretzels, and they want Jesus to unravel them. And he won't. They are obsessed with issues of death. Jesus points them – and us – to life. Resurrection life. New life that is not just a promise that will be fulfilled when we die. We can choose the new life now.

There are many spiritual practices that make it more possible to choose life: prayer, service, study, worship. The spiritual practice of giving was a hard one for me to adopt. Early in my adulthood I was a latter-day Sadducee, working through all my financial obligations, lamenting what I didn't have and worrying about what I needed to save for. I gave only what I thought I could afford. I was a walking case study for the mindset of scarcity – tied up into a financial and spiritual pretzel.

The combination of a priest friend and my wife challenged me to give from abundance. To look toward Resurrection life, and to think about a tithe. I didn't want to, at least not at first. But my wife prevailed, and we started giving proportionally to support God's work in the world. It became a discipline, and in the course of the few years it took us to get to a tithe, I discovered that I no longer gave out of obligation, but out of gratitude. The practice of giving opened me up to new measures of God's grace, and the Resurrection opened up in a new way. And somehow, and this is still a mystery to me, we ended up having more.

It is a gift we can live into now – if we choose it. And if we practice it. And if we learn how to not look back into the snare of scarcity.



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Reflection Questions

- Have you experienced the difference between giving out of obligation versus giving out of joy?
- How is giving *life-giving* for you?
- How do you experience the Holy Spirit nurturing new life in you?

