

God of the Living – Luke 20:27-38 – November 6, 2016

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Our gospel from Luke is a rather strange story where a group of Sadducees come to Jesus and ask him a question about marriage in the afterlife. They lay out a scenario in which a woman is married to a man, but the man dies before he is able to father a child. According to one Jewish law, it was the duty of a man's brothers to marry his widow and have a child with her, so that the man would be assured of having descendants. But the Sadducees wanted to know, what would happen if the brother died before fathering a child? And what if there were seven brothers total and each one married the widow after the previous brother died without having children? What would happen if when the woman herself died – who would be her husband in the afterlife?

To understand this scene, it is helpful to know that the Sadducees did not believe in an afterlife. According to the Harper Collins Bible Dictionary, the Sadducees were a group of mostly priests and community leaders who were wealthy and had good relationships with the Romans, the oppressors of the Jews. Their philosophy was in opposition to that of the Pharisees, which was the standard. The Sadducees did not believe in life after death, so it was important to them to be wealthy and successful in this lifetime, because this is all there is.

So, their question to Jesus came not from any desire to learn from him, but it was an attempt to trap him in a pointless theological debate. They would not have accepted Jesus' love and concern for the poor and the marginalized, because it went against their comfortable standard of living. Why give that up? If this is all there is, then let's make the most of it while we can.

In his response to them, Jesus is aware of their skepticism and won't be drawn into their pointless debate. But he does firmly state his belief and understanding in an afterlife. It is nothing like what we know and experience here on earth, so their question about human relationships is truly pointless. What we will have on the other side of death is something completely different than what we have in this life. Our existence in the afterlife will be fully based in God. It is a transformation into something that has no existence apart from God's love. What we know now is nothing like what we will know then.

I would like to share a story with you that I found on the internet. It comes from a book by Ida Mae Kempel called *What Was in Jeremy's Egg?*

This is a story of a boy named Jeremy who had a terminal illness. Though he was 12 years old, he was still in the second grade. Although there were times when he spoke clearly and distinctly, most of the time Jeremy just irritated his teacher, Doris Miller, as

he squirmed in his seat, drooled and made grunting noises which would interrupt the class.

One day, she called his parents and asked them to come to the school for a consultation. In as understanding a way as possible, she asked them to consider sending Jeremy to a special school with children his own age. Jeremy's mom cried softly into a tissue while her husband answered her. "Miss Miller," he said, "there is no school of that kind nearby. It would be a terrible shock for Jeremy if we had to take him out of this school. We know that he really likes it here."

After they left, Miss Miller sat for a long time staring at the snow outside the window. As she pondered the situation, guilt washed over her. "Oh God," she said, "here I am complaining when my problems are nothing compared with those of that poor family!" From that day on, she tried hard to ignore Jeremy's noises and his blank stares.

Spring came, and the children talked excitedly about the coming of Easter. Doris told them the story of Jesus, and then to emphasize the idea of new life springing forth, she gave each of the children a large plastic egg. "Now," she said to them, "I want you to take this home and bring it back tomorrow with something inside that shows new life. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Miss Miller!" the children responded enthusiastically--all except for Jeremy. He just listened intently, his eyes never leaving her face. He did not even make his usual noises. Had he understood what she had said about Jesus' death and resurrection? Did he understand the assignment?

The next morning, nineteen children came to school, laughing and talking as they placed their eggs in the large wicker basket on Miss Miller's desk. After they had completed their math lesson, it was time to open the eggs. In the first egg, Doris found a flower. "Oh yes, a flower is certainly a sign of new life," she said. "When plants peek through the ground, we know that spring is here."

The next egg contained a plastic butterfly, which looked very real. Doris held it up. "We all know that a caterpillar changes and grows into a beautiful butterfly. Yes, that is new life, too." Next, Doris found a rock with moss on it. She explained that moss, too, showed life. Then Doris opened the fourth egg. She gasped. The egg was empty! Surely it must be Jeremy's, she thought, and, of course, he had not understood her instructions.

Because she did not want to embarrass him, she quietly set the egg aside and reached for another.

Suddenly Jeremy spoke up. "Miss Miller, aren't you going to talk about my egg?" Flustered, Doris replied, "But Jeremy--your egg is empty!" He looked into her eyes and said softly, "Yes, but Jesus' tomb was empty too!"

Time stopped. When she could speak again, Doris asked him, "Do you know why the tomb was empty?" "Oh, yes!" Jeremy exclaimed. "Jesus was killed and put in there. Then his Father raised him up!"

The recess bell rang. While the children excitedly ran out to the schoolyard, Doris sat at her desk and cried. The cold inside her melted completely away.

Three months later, Jeremy died. Those who paid their respects at the mortuary were surprised to see nineteen eggs on top of his casket, all of them empty.

Edited by Deacon Sil Galvan from **What Was In Jeremy's Egg?** from the book *What Was In Jeremy's Egg?*, copyright 1997 by Ida Mae Kempel. Referenced from <http://www.deaconsil.com/content/page/13164.html>

When the Sadducees asked Jesus the question about the afterlife, their scenario was based in a belief that the afterlife is merely a type of continuation of the life we experience now. But Jesus' understanding of that afterlife is one in which we have no existence outside of God's love. We are completely transformed. Made new.

So how does that affect us now? We can choose to live like the Sadducees. Accumulating successes and possessions and status, giving ourselves over to the material pleasures of this world and not showing any concern for those who struggle and suffer. But when we read the New Testament, Jesus didn't do that. He lived his life already existing within God's amazing love.

When we examine the life of Jesus, we get the tiniest glimpse of what it means to exist fully and completely in God's love. We see in him an example of what eternal life truly means. It is a life outwardly focused. With God's love flowing within us and constantly reaching outward toward others. As we grow in our relationship with Christ we have the opportunity to get a taste of what eternal life truly means. It is a life of love. It is a life of community, of sharing, of compassion, of grace, of forgiveness.

Eternal life is the promise of our future, but in Christ, it is one we can begin to live right now.