

A woman without a child or a name (Luke 20:27-38)

What men have placed a premium on, God has not.

by [Oluwatomisin Oredein](#)

November 8, 2019

To receive these posts by email each Monday, [sign up](#).

For more commentary on this week's readings, see the [Reflections on the Lectionary](#) page. For full-text access to all articles, [subscribe](#) to the Century.

Why do we not know the woman's name?

Why is she a minor character in the story when her life is the centerfold of this sacred lesson?

In the Sadducees interpretation of Moses' teachings, her purpose is to bear children—first to her husband, and then to someone else. Her job is to fulfill the cultural expectation placed upon her.

So whose wife will the woman be? To whom does she belong?

Jesus' answer to these burning questions is simple: marriage does not matter here. What men have placed a premium on, God has not. The critical matter of the moment is what happens after the woman's death, not what others thought she should have done with her life.

Jesus changes the topic, putting the woman, the men, and the crowd around the curious Sadducees all on the same plain. Hear this sermon: they cannot die anymore.

Marriage is important to this age. Life is most important in the next.

The Sadducees suggest: Moses said one thing; what do you say?

Jesus corrects: I say what Moses has said.

Moses sees life in God. Ancestors whose lives were made and defined in God's presence are evidence that resurrection means the presence of God, not the presence of man.

Unmarried, finally, the woman dies. Perhaps she dies free, no longer searching for her purpose in being the family's wife. Perhaps she dies no longer suffering under the social stigma of never being a mother and of not being able to be anyone's wife for long.

Perhaps she dies in bitterness or in bondage, trapped under what it means for her life to have unfolded this way. If men receive the legacy of their name in their children, what do women have? Without children, she bears no significance. Her name will certainly not be remembered.

We do not know her name. This is cemented in her lack of companionship and ultimately in her childlessness.

But resurrection, the recovery of spiritual truth, reinstates her importance. It gives her something to be called before she was called wife—and it does so posthumously. In resurrection, we all—the readers, the hearers—are summoned to ask about her life, to see about her name.

Is she Abela ("breathing")? Ava or Eve ("living and breathing")? Perhaps she has a name that suggests she survived as long as she did.

Is she Brielle or Gabrielle ("God's bravest woman")? Etha ("resilient, solid")? Samara ("watched over by God")? Perhaps her name speaks to her resilience amid life's many misfortunes.

Does her name convey the manner in which she lived in the world? Chaya ("full of life")? Is God's faithfulness known in her name? Elise ("promise of God") or Johanna ("God is merciful")?

Does her name signal her tenderness and vulnerability? Leah ("delicate woman")? Her strength or fortitude? Maaria ("rebellious woman") or Mckayla or Michelle ("Which man is like God")? Her desire? Ruth ("mate, companion")? Or her strange and ultimate invisibility? Zillah ("like a shadow")?

She is all these names and more; she cannot die anymore. In Jesus' eyes, neither her companionship nor her name comprises the arc of her meaning. Her life does. She is a child of the resurrection.