

November 10, Ordinary 32C (Luke 20:27-38)

Resurrection is where God is—across generations, across circumstances.

by [Oluwatomisin Oredein](#) in the [October 23, 2019](#) issue

Those who say there is no resurrection have a question for Jesus about resurrection.

We can sense the deceit in the moment, a trap meant to pit the radical teacher against his own tradition. But the deceit gives way to a flurry of realities, the loudest being the commonality of tradition: Jesus' questioners start from the same place he does. Both the teacher and his skeptical hearers revere the tradition, lauding the writings of Moses as sacred text.

They vary, however, in their interpretation of the tradition's precepts. The question of the Sadducees sits strangely: If they do not believe in the circumstances into which they are inquiring, what, in fact, are they asking?

This much is clear: they are unsure about endings. They start in the same place as Jesus, but they do not know where the journey ends. So they ask—as deceitful, honest, skeptical pupils. How does this line of thinking things alive again align with the tradition they both so trust?

Jesus answers—and exposes the holes in the culture, the places where it is still in process. People spend their entire lives falling into cultural expectations, such as marrying (or being married off). These are the walls of their lives, the place in which they live—their religion. Their prescribed social roles become their liturgy. Such expectations are so immense that the Sadducees have shaped their spiritual thinking in this direction.

But to fulfill cultural expectation is to take up residence in that particular age. Moses' instructions on the social aspects of life have collided with questions of the afterlife, but Jesus has an answer: stop trying to combine the two. Don't force temporary life into the mold of permanence. God is God not of the dead but of the living.

Marriage belongs in this present place, but a union far greater resides in the next. The dead are raised. Why think of marriage and progeny as your life's mission? This is dead thinking. Why not join with God, the one who makes all living? See what an increase in life looks like!

Partnership matters. It is the difference between death and life. Marriage (joining) in this age serves as insurance for death's eventual arrival. It prepares a way for death through the chapters of life, whether there is one such chapter or, as in the story the Sadducees tell, seven. But once someone dies, if they are joined to God they know not death. They know life, for all joined to God live.

The resurrection reminds the world of the partnership God made with humanity, a partnership aimed toward life. To try to force the form of a limited earthly life into the expanse that is life with God only shows the shortcomings of this age. To think of life is to think outside of *this* life. It is to leave time to its own devices, knowing that life together ultimately takes on a different hue, a way of being that exceeds the limits of how one can currently be.

To refer to "this age" as such is not to insult it. It is a reminder that the God who created this age and lived in it as a teacher is pushing for his hearers to understand it only as a moment, not the be-all-end-all.

The resurrection presents a lesson in time. Moses understands this, that life can be found again on the other side of death. A bush tells him that things that should consume life are in fact under the will and control of God. God speaks to Moses while a bush does not burn—two impossible things that nevertheless enter into the realm of the possible. Perhaps Moses learns that resurrection can look like not being consumed by that which should consume you. Resurrection can look like the opposite of what should be.

God being with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob proves resurrection's tilt. It is in going to a foreign land under God's command and having a child at an impossible age. It is in journeying to one's death with the hope that life might be on the other side. It is in wrestling with God—and living. It is in the later lives of others spent authoring the writings by which both Jesus and the Sadducees abide.

Resurrection means living on even though circumstances should not allow it to be so. It is the miracle of persisting, of stubbornly illuminating the glory of life.

In the Sadducees' story, the woman outlives the men whose lives were supposed to enhance her own. The Sadducees inventory the men whom this woman was not able to keep alive. The misfortune of death appears to be the woman's lot. Jesus instead inventories Moses. His genealogy points to Moses as the resurrection of the spirit of their people, for God was with him. Resurrection is where God is, across generations, across circumstances. The Sadducees focus on the men dying. Jesus sees how the generations have lived on.

The question of who a socially disadvantaged person "belongs to" itself belongs to this age. It misses the miracle of resurrection. Resurrection might restore the physical body and social relationships, cultural ideas of togetherness. But it might also mend the misunderstanding that we belonged to anyone but God in the first place. The woman in the story also dies—claimed by no one. Her resurrection does not rely on these men.

Resurrection is about how everyone is claimed by God, wrested from the surety of death. For to God, all are alive.