

**Holy Trinity Headington Quarry 11/11/07 10.00am**  
**3 before Advent**  
**2 Thess 2:1-5,13-17; Luke 20:27-38**

May I speak in the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Before I talk about remembrance, I'm going to focus on this morning's Gospel, with its tale of Jesus and the Sadducees. One of the most memorable things I learnt in Sunday School was that the Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection. How do we know? Because they're sad, you see... Mind you, that's not as laughable as the story they cook up, which is clearly a low budget re-make of "Seven Brides for Seven Brothers", featuring only one bride. But of course, as Luke reminds us at the beginning, the whole thing is built on a premise they don't accept: as they don't believe in the resurrection, they're not really interested in whose wife she'll be in the afterlife, but in making Jesus look silly.

I fear that this scenario is repeated all too often around us. I'm off to a conference later this week, and while I manage to follow most of the presentations, one or two of the questions from the audience leave me utterly confused – and I sometimes wonder whether they're trying to make themselves look good rather than engage with what's gone before. Still, the speaker usually does their best to provide some sort of answer and ensure that everyone leaves with ego intact. I half-wonder whether that's what Jesus does here. If I were in that situation and had the wit, I'd probably say something like "Why don't you wait until the resurrection and see for yourselves?" But maybe they're paying him the compliment of believing that he might have an answer: not only treating him like a rabbi to whom they can put their most cherished questions, but even – by implication – suggesting that he has knowledge of the afterlife which they don't.

That's something to bear in mind when people ask us about our faith. Once people discover you're a Christian, they can come up with the strangest of questions – and expect you to have all the answers. (It certainly happens to the clergy.) It can be very tempting to dismiss them, or fob them off with a riposte like I suggested earlier. But the model Jesus gives us is rather different. Presumably he too knew they were Sadducees. But he didn't dismiss them because of that, he didn't make assumptions about their motivation (as I've been doing throughout this sermon). Perhaps this question was all that was keeping them from believing in the

resurrection. If he showed he took them seriously, then maybe they would take him seriously. In fact, the final verse of this story, which never made it to our lectionary, tells us that this was indeed the case: after Jesus' response, Luke tells us that "some of the scribes answered 'Teacher, you have spoken well.' For they no longer dared to ask him another question."

And what an answer Jesus gives. Not only does he address their immediate question, but he also goes to the heart of the matter and speaks directly about the resurrection, the thing which is really troubling them, arguing on their own terms by referring to Moses just as they did. Without this apparently ridiculous question, we might never have heard the line "He is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive". Isn't that appropriate for this season of remembrance, when we follow the commemoration of All Souls last week with those who have died in conflict today? "He is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive".

These are words of comfort, but they are also words which are at the heart of our faith. Christians – to use Jesus' phrase from this morning's Gospel – are "children of the resurrection". We believe that death is not the end, that the resurrection of Jesus is God's proof of the unending life which he freely gives to everyone: "to him, all of them are alive." Now, of course, that raises all sorts of questions: what happens after death? what's heaven like? will we meet our pets there? These are things which are really important for some people. But they're a bit like the Sadducees' question about marriage in heaven: when it comes down to it, these concerns are only incidental. If we believe that God has made this eternal life possible for us, by the greatest miracle of all, then we already believe in a God who cares for us so much that all shall be well.

How do we know that God cares for us? Not by trying to get some special insight into the future and speculate about what may be, but by recalling the past. This is one of the reasons we continue to read the Old Testament, because in it we follow the story of how the people of Israel came to know God. Even as we look back in our own lives, we may be able to see God at work, bringing us to where we are today. Counting our blessings may seem a little self-indulgent, but if we do, the more we realise how dependent we are on God, and God working through other people. (There's a thought as we prepare for Stewardship Sunday next week.)

So, today, we pause to remember those who have given their lives in war: the servicemen and women of the armed forces in conflicts of the past and in the present; police and peacekeepers; civilians caught in the crossfire; all whose lives have been so scarred through physical or mental suffering that they will never be the same again. It is in part thanks to them that we are where we are today: as the epitaph reads “For your today, we gave our tomorrow”. Now we can’t change what has happened, we can’t even earn or deserve their sacrifice somehow in retrospect, but we remember them with gratitude, and we live in the light of all who have made our lives what they are.

And as Christians, that’s one reason we come to Church each Sunday: “This is my body, which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of me.” Our faith teaches us always to be mindful, to remember. That doesn’t mean that we are to be backward-looking, yearning for an age that is past; quite the opposite. It is because of what God has already done for us, shown in his death and resurrection, that we have our hope for the future, our confidence in the goodness of heaven, the promise of eternal life. We are the “children of the resurrection” and our God “is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him – thanks to him – everyone is alive”. **Amen.**