



**Sermons from St. Marks
United Church of Christ
New Albany, Indiana**



**Trusting God to Have a Point
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November 11, 2007**

Wouldn't you love it if you could sit down with Jesus and ask him whatever you wanted to? It's frustrating to most everyone that God doesn't make things a little bit more obvious.

One Sunday in the New Directions Sunday School class, it was brought up that if God would speak out loud and regularly to us, it would be a lot easier to tell when it is God speaking and when it is just our own thoughts.

To make matters worse, we read stories in the Bible about people who didn't realize how lucky they were - they had God in the flesh right there, spending time with them, answering questions and all that some of them were interested in was in stumping Jesus.

People were always trying to trick him and make him look bad. He was questioned about paying money to God or taxes to Caesar in an attempt to trick him into saying something against Caesar. When Jesus said the great command is to love your neighbor as yourself, He was asked who is my neighbor in an attempt to take him off guard.

He was asked about performing miracles on the Sabbath breaking the Sabbath laws. People tried to make Jesus look bad. Today's passage is no different.

The Sadducees were a group of folks who did not believe in resurrection so they make up this scenario about a woman having 7 husbands and then saying "O.K. Jesus, try to figure this one out quickly - who is this woman going to be married to in heaven?"

The Sadducees didn't really want the answer - it wasn't a serious question, they were trying to stump him to show how foolish the idea of a resurrection from the dead was. Why? So that their views would be seen as right.

So they use an extreme example based on the laws of Moses given in Deuteronomy. The law given by God in Deuteronomy says that if a man dies without a son, his brother must marry his widow.

Then, the first son that she bears must be named after the dead brother so that his name will live on.

The purpose of this law was to assure that each family and tribe in Israel was carried on by future generations.

So the Sadducees give the example of a woman marrying, having no children before the husband dies, then marries a brother, has no children before he dies, marries another brother, has no children before he dies and so on for 7 times. They are trying to stump Jesus then when they ask, "O.K. you say there is a resurrection after death, who will this woman be married to then if all those husbands are resurrected with her?"

The problem is that they were making their entire argument based on the idea that life in heaven will be just like it is now so the present institution of marriage is assumed by the Sadducees to continue on in the kingdom.

So, a woman who was married 7 times would be in a terrible predicament in heaven. But Jesus didn't get stumped.

He easily answered that the kingdom of God will be very different from the way things are now. There will be no death, no bearing of children, no marriage so resurrection will not pose any problem for husbands and wives.

Marriage is for now, but not for heaven.

I don't really like this passage on its face value.

Whatever heaven is like, I like to think of myself married to Todd there, so I'm not too thrilled with Jesus saying that marriage is for this age - for this time now. And I'm not too thrilled with this passage because to our modern day understanding of marriage as based on love, you see the law taken literally and a woman ends up having to marry 6 of her brother in laws.

Today, we might easily agree that a brother should look after his brother's widow, but this law did not say look after, it specifically said to marry her and to try to have a child with her too.

Of course biblical marriage was very different than marriage is today.

In fact, we can say all we want about the high divorce rate and people not taking marriage as seriously as they used to, and those would all be very valid points, but it's a lot better than it was in Biblical times where multiple wives and having mistresses and prostitutes was viewed as O.K. But the point of this passage for us today, is not to get an understanding of what marriage ought to be like, but the point I think is that we are a lot like the Sadducees - we have assumptions about life and death that are based on a limited amount of knowledge - we have assumptions about God that are based on a limited amount of knowledge.

In other words, we think we know more than we do and part of faith is realizing that there is a lot that we don't understand and realizing that we can live with that.

We don't really understand how the world was created and we don't really understand exactly how God speaks to us or how God works in the world, but we have a lot of assumptions that we probably ought to try to lose.

For example, we often assume that for a miracle of God to take place that something supernatural has to happen.

In Biblical times, when Jesus healed the man who had epileptic seizures, it was a miracle, but when we receive an antibiotic that cures an infection or an immunization that prevents a dangerous disease, we don't usually call it a miracle -it's just modern science. I can imagine God saying "Hello people" this is how I'm speaking to you, this is how I'm working, look how much more you know as a society today than you did in the past. Who do you think made that possible?

In Biblical times, it was a miracle when an angel appeared to Mary and to the shepherds, but we don't call it a miracle that we can communicate with people thousands of miles away with a simple dial of a phone or typing on computer keyboards.

It's considered a miracle that David was brave enough to fight Goliath, but we don't call it a miracle that in every generation, thousands of men and women have been willing to risk their lives to serve our country.

It was considered a miracle when Jesus multiplied the fishes and the loaves, but we don't call it a miracle of God that soup kitchens are organized all over the world, that food and money and medicine is shared with the needy everyday.

If we truly are to praise God as our creator, then we should be acknowledging the incredible ways that we have grown and learned and invented and communicated and shared as God's working in the world and speaking to us.

I know there is bad stuff too that happens all the time because the knowledge and abilities that we have as humans means that we are also capable of making mistakes, being selfish and greedy, being competitive, being violent.

And some bad and horrible things happen that have nothing to do with people's choices. That's when all the questions of faith come in because there is so much we don't understand and can't understand.

We are a small part of creation trying to understand how all of creation works and how God works.

If we think we understand it all, we've got to be mistaken because God is still speaking, still teaching us more and more all the time.

When Jesus said that marriage in heaven wouldn't be like here he was basically saying, "You're

making assumptions that aren't right and you don't even realize it. You can't get it all with a human mind.

You're going to have to trust God at some point."

I believe that faith asks questions, all kinds of questions, but there comes a place where answers can't be found - at least not today - and faith then is trusting God enough to live with not knowing it all or having it all make sense.

There's the story of a father and son.

One night a house caught fire and a young boy was forced to flee to the roof. The father stood on the ground below with outstretched arms, calling to his son, "Jump! I'll catch you." He knew the boy had to jump to save his life.

All the boy could see, however, was flame, smoke, and blackness.

As can be imagined, he was afraid to leave the roof. His father kept yelling: "Jump! I will catch you." But the boy protested, "Daddy, I can't see you."

The father replied, "But I can see you and that's all that matters."

Sometimes God speaks and the answers become more clear, but often times God calls us to make leaps of faith in which we literally trust God to catch us. Faith allows us to live life not necessarily able to see it all, but knowing that we are seen, not necessarily knowing all the answers, but believing that we are known.