

WPC
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November 7, 2010

Resurrection: This Changes Everything
Mark 12:13-17; Luke 20:27-40 (Mark 12:18-27; Matthew 22:23-33)

For some strange reason, I have baseball on my mind these days. As many of you know, I'm an avid San Francisco Giants fan. For most of my life, that meant being disappointed at the end of the baseball season either because the Giants hadn't made the playoffs or, on those rare occasions when they did make it, because they would lose in some horrible fashion. Since moving from New York to San Francisco in 1958, the Giants had never won the World Series, a fact that people around me loved to rub in.

In fact, I seem to recall that just last week, I was assured by some youth in this very church that the Giants would lose again this year. (I'll try to go easy on you, guys. I'll really try!) But I have to say that the most difficult barbs have come from my brother's family.

Back in 2005, when my brother Ted became engaged to be married, my whole family was struck by what a caring, loving person his fiancée Elena was. There was only one problem I could see at the time: my family members are passionate San Francisco Giant fans, while she came from a family of Los Angeles Dodger fans. The Giants and Dodgers are longtime

rivals, a rivalry at least as intense as the one between UW-WSU or UW-Oregon. But somehow, miraculously, in spite of this obstacle, Ted and Elena's marriage has been rock solid, and we were able to join together in one family Giants and Dodger fans – with God, all things are indeed possible!

But Elena's father and brothers never tired of good-naturedly reminding us that the Dodgers had won 5 championships since moving to California. And they would always ask Ted and me: so, how many World Series have the Giants won?

But now, FINALLY, Ted and I can look them in the eye and say, "The 2010 San Francisco Giants are World Series Champions!" (You know I was going to have to work that in this morning!)

But also - the reason I bring this up is that our text for today reminds me of a hard-fought baseball game between Jesus and the religious leaders. Let me explain...

Much has transpired in the life of Jesus since his encounter with Zacchaeus that we looked at last week. Jesus is now in Jerusalem, he's already cleansed the temple, and he's now engaged in a series of controversies with Jewish leaders. The end of chapter 19 states, "Every day Jesus was teaching in the temple. The chief priests, the scribes, and the

leaders of the people kept looking for a way to kill him; but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were spellbound by what they heard.”

The structure of Luke 20 is absolutely fascinating. The Jewish authorities are interrogating Jesus, trying to trap him in his own words. They ask him three of the toughest, nastiest theological questions they can possibly think of, each one nastier than the one before. In a sense, according to Tom Long, this is Jesus’ ordination exam.

The first question is asked by the chief priests and the scribes, who could be described as the starting pitcher. They throw something of a fastball – by what authority do you do these things? Jesus knocks it over the fence for a solo home run. So they call some relief pitchers out to the mound, some spies who pretended to be honest, in order to strike Jesus out. The second question is a bit of a sneaky slider, “Great teacher, is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar?” (Luke 20:20-26 – we read the account in Mark because I liked some of the details included there that are missing in Luke). The ball they pitch has great movement and a lesser hitter might well have flailed at it, but Jesus puts that one in the bleachers as well. So they go to the bullpen and call for the Sadducees, who didn’t believe in the resurrection and who are definitely throwing smoke. But once again, Jesus is up to the

challenge, and once again, it's Goodbye Mr. Spalding – a game-winning home run.

Matthew ends this story by saying that the crowd was astounded at Jesus' teaching, while Luke says that the scribes no longer dared to ask him another question.

Three very tricky questions, three solid responses from Jesus.

The thing about questions is that every question we ask reveals something important about ourselves. Built into every question are the assumptions of the questioner. The question, "Where were you last night at 9:00 pm?" means different things when a parent asks a child, or when a friend asks a friend, or when a police officer asks a suspect. "Whenever anyone asks a question, the assumptions, the prejudices, the biases, the world of the one asking the question are built into the question. You can't get away from it." (Tom Long, Princeton Seminary Chapel service, 12/15/92)

For instance, Tom Long tells a story of a kid who was starting a new Kindergarten class at a new school – the little boy looked around at the artwork on the wall and screamed, "Who painted all these ugly pictures?"

His mother was humiliated and shushed him up, “Don’t say that, these are beautiful pictures.”

But the teacher understood the assumption in the question: a frightened child moving into a strange environment, wondering if he would be able to measure up, so she knelt down beside the child and said, “In here, you don’t have to paint pretty pictures. You can even paint angry pictures.” Built into the question is the assumptive world of the questioner.

You can see that very clearly in today’s text from the Gospel of Luke. Some Sadducees, in the hope of discrediting Jesus, pose a difficult theological question. Before we get to the question, we need to understand who the Sadducees were.

The Sadducees were of the priestly class, many of them aristocratic and wealthy. They considered as authentic Scripture only the first five books of the Old Testament, the books of Moses (the Pentateuch). They did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. The Pharisees, on the other hand, not only included the prophets and the writing in their Scripture but also believed in the authority of the oral tradition from Moses. In that oral tradition and the other writings of Scripture was the basis for belief in the

resurrection. (Fred Craddock, *Interpretation*, 238) So it's not surprising that the Sadducees frame their question to Jesus in terms of Moses' teaching.

And they said to Jesus, "OK, resurrection boy, we've got a question for you: Suppose there was a woman who married a man who had six brothers. Now, the man died before they had any children, and as you know, the law of Moses requires that one of the other brothers should take her as his wife so the family line will continue, and brother #1 did that. But unfortunately, he also died before they had any children, so brother #2 took his place, and unfortunately he died, and so on and so on... they all died, then she died. "One bride, seven brothers, eight funerals, and no children." (Long) Now whose wife will she be in the resurrection?

So there you have it. Well, it's a multiple choice question, really, and all of the options the Sadducees think Jesus has are poor. Answer "A" was: well, in the age to come she'll be married to one of them – she'll be the first brother's wife, or the last brother's wife, or the fourth brother's wife; pick one. This is a bad choice because each brother was equally her husband. Why, in the resurrection, would one brother have more of a claim than any of the others?

This first choice is indefensible, it's absurd, but it's no better than answer "B" which states that in the resurrection, she will be the wife of *all seven* brothers. Lamar Williamson, Jr. notes that this evokes the ludicrous image of an overcrowded bedroom in the afterlife." (Williamson, *Interpretation*, 223) This answer is "too confusing, conflictual, and finally absurd to deserve serious consideration." (Long)

That tilts the whole thing toward answer "C," which is where the Sadducees wanted to go in the first place: in the age to come, since she can't be married to one of them or all of them, then, there is no resurrection.

A, B, or C? Jesus chooses...D. He doesn't answer the question; instead he challenges their basic assumptions. He will not be trapped by their limited choices. What are the assumptions in the question?

Well, to begin with, there is the assumption that if there is an age to come, this woman is going to be somebody's property in it. Rachel Wahlberg in one of her books imagines that if this hypothetical woman was real and she overheard this interrogation, she would hear the Sadducees say, "She was the property of seven men, now which one of them will own her in the age to come?" (as referenced by Tom Long, *Matthew*, 253)

And Jesus says, “In the age to come, she belongs to no one but God. She will be like the angels, the very child of God.” He overturns their assumptions.

Another assumption that’s overturned is that “the afterlife, were there to be one, would be simply an extension of the present tense, that God’s future would simply be an eternal version of the status quo.” (Long. 253) In this age, people belong to people, so they will in the age to come. In this age, people marry, so they will in the age to come. Jesus challenges and overturns this assumption.

In this age, people marry, but not in the age to come. In this age, people die, but in the age to come death and pain will be no more. In this age, this woman belongs in an oppressive system, but in the age to come justice will roll down like waters and righteousness like an everflowing stream. Tom Long says that “the resurrection power of God does more than preserve; it transforms.” (Long, 253) Resurrection changes everything.

Even in our own age, too many women are still treated as property, taken in and cast out by man after man, but in the age to come, there’ll be none of that. Even in our own age, we have war and rumors of war, but in the age to come, the wolf will lie down with the lamb. Even in our own age,

men, women, and children all over the world go to bed with an empty stomach, but in the age to come, everyone will feast in the Kingdom of God. In this age...oh, but in the age to come...something new will overturn our assumptions, and because of the resurrection, we will be transformed. Amen.