

SERMON 808

25th Week after Pentecost

November 10, 2013

919th Week as Priest

745th Week at St Dunstan's

10th Week at Epiphany-Tallassee

THE SADDUCEES

Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Sadducees believed in the “What You See Is What You Get” approach to life. There was no heaven, no life after death, no resurrection from the dead, no messiah who was going to come and save the people of Israel. What you see is what you get. It’s a modern way of looking at the world, something akin to “It is what it is.”

And if you see the world in this way, it’s perfectly natural to doubt anything that suggests mystery, or faith, or love—or any emotional, subjective, spiritual possibility for the life we live and the world we live in. There is no physical, scientific evidence for such things, you know—mystery, faith, love cannot be measured in the laboratory or quantified mathematically.

In fact, if you see the world this way, you are extremely skeptical about the unsubstantiated claims that people of faith

tend to make. Life, they would say, is about the here and now—not the maybe-someday, or the if-only, or the wouldn't-it-be-nice.

The Sadducees were Aristotelians in a sense. They believed in observation, testing a hypothesis, categorizing the evidence, and compiling the results. They were highly intelligent, urbane, sophisticated, well-educated, and thoroughly cynical regarding claims of a coming Messiah.

And they couldn't wait to get their hands on Jesus of Nazareth, whom they considered a country bumpkin from the hills of Galilee, a redneck carpenter, a self-taught teacher. It wouldn't take long at all for their scholars to rip him to shreds, to make a fool of him, and to show everyone that he was a fake and a fraud. And it would be extremely helpful to their own cause. They would come out smelling like a rose, and the Pharisees would look ridiculous, gullible, and naïve in comparison. It was the perfect set-up.

The question they posed to Jesus was completely hypothetical. Yes, Moses had left instructions regarding a brother's widow. **B**ut the part about the seven brothers, each one taking the woman as wife, each one dying—that was completely made up, an exaggerated example that they knew would confuse the rabbi to no end. So they posed it: "Whose wife will the woman be?"

Jesus was more than they bargained for, more than they expected, much more than they could have imagined. **H**e was God made man. **H**e was the Anointed One, the Messiah, the

Christ. Jesus knew the mind of **God**, for he and the **Father** were **One** and had always been.

But this confrontation was not about competition or winning, or showing someone else up. **For** Jesus it was always about the **Kingdom**. **For** Jesus it was always an opportunity to show **God's** activity in our lives—to demonstrate that mystery, faith, love, hope, joy, peace—all of those intangible, spiritual, emotional, subjective qualities of life were real, and important, and essential for anyone who desires to live in such a way that would honor **God**.

And so he did not answer their question (which he had a habit of doing on numerous occasions). Instead, he spoke of a reality beyond this one. “Those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage.” **He** was saying that living this life in a way that is worthy of **God** ought to be our essential aim. **And** he was saying that yes, indeed, there is life after death, and there is resurrection from the dead. **And** he was saying that we really have no earthly idea, or heavenly idea, of what the **Kingdom of Heaven** will be—only that it will be a place and a state of faith, love, hope, joy, and peace—beyond our greatest expectations and fondest dreams.

Here is the moral of the story, at least the way I see it ...

The Sadducees no longer exist as a sect within Judaism. **But** there are plenty of people who think and act just like them, and

they are always ready to convince you you're wrong about the life of faith.

But don't let that cynicism and doubt dissuade you.

We shouldn't give up on our hopes and dreams.

We shouldn't dismiss the promises that Jesus makes on our behalf.

And we must always remember that it is God's good pleasure to love us, and to care for us, and to yearn to be in strong relationship with us. Once again, I will say, there is much more to this life than just what we can see. God is present with us. Christ redeems us. And the Holy Spirit sustains us. These are true words, and worthy for us to follow. AMEN.

822 words

Three Main Jewish Sects

	PHARISEES	SADDUCEES	ESSENES
General	in the world but not of the world	in the world and of the world	neither in the world nor of the world
Law	valued oral law, also accepted old written law	rejected oral law, accepted only old written law	wrote hidden law, accepted and gave interpretations to old law
Interpretation	accurate, precise	pragmatic, accommodating	creative, adaptive
God	participates in events of world	removed from the evil of world	Messiah will destroy the evil of world
Fate	Fate cooperates in human actions	rejected Fate, emphasized agency	accepted Fate
Society	kind to each other, lenient (Mt 5:46; Acts 5:39)	rude to each other, boorish, punitive (compare Acts 5:40)	great attachment to each other
Main Locations	rural villages and cities	urban centers	remote communes, separate quarters
Gentiles	partially accepted	openly accepted	mostly rejected
Property	lived simply	sought wealth	despised wealth, held goods in common
Pleasure			shunned pleasure
Souls	imperishable, good souls alone go on to another body, wicked souls suffer eternal punishment, believed in resurrection	no afterlife, no eternal rewards or punishments	bodies perishable, souls immortal, liberated upon death