

**Year C: Proper 27b Hag 1:15b-29; Ps. 145:1-5, 18-21; 2Thess 2:1-17; Lk 20:27-38  
St. Barnabas, Florissant – November 10, 2019**

**Focus Sentence:** Resurrection and life is God's promise to us.

### **Sermon**

**I offer these thoughts in the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit....**

If you were paying attention to this morning's Scripture lessons, you might have noticed a subtle shift in the overall theme.

In the many weeks between Pentecost (which we celebrated this year on June 9) and last Sunday (when we celebrated All Saints Sunday), we have been examining the various demands of Christian discipleship. What exactly must we do, in our own personal lives, and in our relationships with God and with our neighbors, to be faithful followers of Jesus Christ?

Over those weeks, we've heard Jesus, Paul, and even the Hebrew prophets remind us again and again that commitment to God and to following Jesus demands complete love for God and our neighbor. We heard that even our own close family ties are not to interfere with our commitment to Jesus. And we also heard that our dearest possessions are not to blind us to our responsibility to help neighbors in need.

And then, we heard that following Jesus might very well bring upon us the scorn of the world and the derision of those closest to us. What we might call, in the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the "cost of discipleship," or the price of following Jesus.

Finally, last week, on All Saints Sunday, we heard Luke's version of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus gives us a vivid portrait of what it looks like to be a saint, a blessed one, and one close to the heart of Jesus.

**PAUSE**

Well, those many weeks have represented a lot of work and learning for us Christian strivers, and a lot of soul-searching to determine if we do measure up to the status of a real follower of Jesus, to the status of a saint.

**PAUSE**

This morning, that subtle shift in theme that I mentioned at the beginning of my sermon is one that moves from the ongoing examination of discipleship to a new question about what happens later. What is life after death all about? Or in other words, if I can do a fairly faithful job in living my life as a follower of Jesus, what will be my reward? Or in yet other words, maybe in our more cynical moments, we might even ask if there really IS a reward?

**PAUSE**

Well, the questioners who come to Jesus in this morning's passage from Luke's Gospel are Sadducees, people described by Luke as "those who say there is no resurrection." The Sadducees, as non-believers in life after death, are obviously insincere in their questioning of Jesus; they want only to embarrass Jesus, and so they ask Jesus a ridiculous question about a woman who outlives seven husbands. In case you're wondering, Ch. 25 of Deuteronomy (v. 5) does state that the brother of a man who dies without an heir should take his brother's widow as his wife, in order to provide an heir to the dead man and prevent his name from being forgotten in Israel.

Be that as it may, and forgetting for a moment the insincerity of the Sadducees as they question Jesus, we today might have more sincere questions about the nature of life after death. Particularly when a beloved spouse has preceded us in death, and we are remarried to a second beloved spouse, what *will* the relationships be like in heaven? Who will be married to whom?

Jesus answers the Sadducees' question, and ours, by stating that life in heaven will be totally different from anything we've experienced here on earth. There isn't any marrying after the resurrection. Apparently, we'll be very happy to be in the presence of Jesus, and I would think, of the other followers of Jesus, and the married relationships we had during our earthly life won't be part of that existence at all. We'll just enjoy being in each other's company, and bask in the love of God.

Incidentally, I especially like Jesus' final comment to his Sadducee questioners: "Now [God] is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to [God] all of them are alive." That seems pretty much plainly to answer the basic question of "IS there a reward for faithful discipleship?"

## **PAUSE**

It's natural, as we go through our lives striving to faithful in following Jesus, that we have questions about heaven and life after death. And it's not easy being faithful, so let's go back to the comforting words we heard from Haggai this morning. Over these past weeks, we've heard lots of angry words from the prophets in our Hebrew Scripture readings about the failures of us humans, but we should remember that another job of the prophets was to offer reassurance to people in their difficulties.

Isaiah does so, and Haggai offers it as well this morning. To the Jewish exiles who have finally returned from Babylon to face the daunting task of rebuilding from the ruined ashes of Jerusalem, Haggai proclaims three separate times, "Take courage!" Take courage because "I am with you, ... My spirit abides among you; do not fear." Jesus of course reaffirms that divine message of reassurance just before his ascension, when he proclaims, "...I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

### **PAUSE**

Those words of reassurance are very comforting as we continue our journey, as we struggle with the demands of following Jesus, and as we ponder those questions about resurrection and life after death. God once again, in Jesus, has promised to be with us always, and so we have very good reason to "take courage."

### **PAUSE**

Sisters and brothers, there is indeed a shift in our Scriptural lectionary themes at this time in the church year. In a few short weeks, we will once again find ourselves in the season of Advent, when we reflect on the coming of Jesus into our world both as the Infant of Christmas, but also as that merciful Judge who will meet us at the resurrection of the dead.

So, soldier on in following Jesus, and in *mission* to this world, sisters and brothers, and take the fullest comfort in the words of Paul that we heard this morning: "...may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and through grace gave us eternal comfort and good hope, comfort your hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word."

Now let the church say.....

**AMEN.**