

*Like angels, we are children of the resurrection*

Luke 20.27-38

November 6, 2016, All Saints

Tim Phillips, Seattle First Baptist Church

I want to take an unofficial poll this morning. How many of you are sick and tired of this election?

I'm feeling Barbara Gibson's version of Psalm 146 this morning:

*People, don't put your trust*

*in the rich or in politicians.*

*They can't possibly save you ...*

*their money and their power*

*are buried with them in the dirt.*

And if there is any hope for us this morning, it has to come from some other kind of energy –

the kind that has been there from the beginning;

the kind that made the galaxies and sustains all life;

an energy that embraces us right now

and has the power to do more than we can ever ask or imagine.

An extra hour of sleep didn't really help that much this morning because I'm tired and what I need is some other kind of energy.

Now we humans have been here before. The story for this morning is about religious-political leaders on a campaign to contain or to shut down the kind of energy that could change the world.

### **Luke 20.27-38**

<sup>27</sup>Some Sadducees, those who say there is no resurrection, came to Jesus

<sup>28</sup>and asked him a question, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies, leaving a wife but no children, the man shall marry the widow and raise up children for his brother.

<sup>29</sup>Now there were seven brothers; the first married, and died childless;  
<sup>30</sup>then the second <sup>31</sup>and the third married her, and so in the same way all  
seven died childless. <sup>32</sup>Finally the woman also died. <sup>33</sup>In the resurrection,  
therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had married  
her.”

<sup>34</sup>Jesus said to them, “Those who belong to this age marry and are given  
in marriage; <sup>35</sup>but those who are considered worthy of a place in the age  
to come and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are  
given in marriage. <sup>36</sup>Indeed they cannot die anymore, because they are  
like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection.  
<sup>37</sup>And the fact that the dead are raised Moses himself showed, in the  
story about the bush, where he speaks of the Lord as the God of  
Abraham and Sarah, the God of Isaac and Rebekah, and the God of  
Jacob, Rachel, and Leah. <sup>38</sup>Now God is God not of the dead, but of the  
living; for to God all of them are alive.”

And among us, this morning ...

Doug Welti

Isabel Anderson

Gordon Harper

Peter Koshi

Win Waite

Jane Foster

Connie Phelps

Lee Elgee

Susan Irwin

Joyce Ostergren

Vivian Sandaas

Charles Z. Smith

B.J. Cole

Bruce Hayes

and Ellen Eng Lee ...

In the light of that energy that embraces us this morning;  
the energy that has been there from the beginning;

that made the galaxies and sustains all life;  
the energy that gives us hope and calls us to love;  
the energy that flows through the veins of our children;  
in the light of that energy  
all of these are alive to us today.

When the religious-political leaders come to Jesus with a ridiculous question about the resurrection, they have an agenda. They have already started looking for a way to kill Jesus. And their question is more than an attempt to discredit his teaching. They want something more than to embroil him in a theological debate about life after death.

They want to send a message. They want to send a message to Jesus and to anyone who was crazy enough to follow him.

The message is simple: When Jesus dies, the revolution is over. Dead is dead.

You may have noticed that their parable about this poor woman keeps repeating that line that each of the brothers – and therefore this poor woman -- “died childless.”

Resurrection for them meant that you have some survivors to carry on the family name in *this* life. And if that’s not the case, any talk of resurrection is ridiculous.

Perhaps this was a slam about Jesus himself if, as the gospels seem to indicate, Jesus was not married nor did he have any children of his own.

And even if there are biblical scholars today who may refute that, the point the political-religious establishment is trying to make is that when Jesus is dead, the revolution will be over. There will be no survivors -- no challenge to the powers of oppression, no vision for a new creation, no imagination about a “beloved community” of love and justice and peace.

Not only will Jesus die, he will die childless.

Now given that we are all gathered here this morning, 2000 years later telling this story, may provide some evidence that they were wrong.

And this is, if you allow me to paraphrase, Jesus' response to those who wished him dead:

Death is not about being dead.  
And living is not just about being alive.

Death is not about being dead. My dad died 8 years ago this month and I can tell you that I am still dealing with him. I still struggle with him and I still learn from him and I see him in times and in places that surprise me. Sometimes these days I get up in the morning and look in the mirror and think: "Hey Dad, how's it going?" In some ways, my dad is more alive to me now than he was when he was living.

I can't tell you how many times I sit with people who, for healthy reasons or hurtful ones, are still very much dealing with a relative or a spouse or a friend who has died but is very much alive.

When Thomas Moore was here a week ago talking about aging, I remembered a line from his *Care of the Soul*: "we cannot solve our 'emotional' problems until we grasp the mystery that honoring the divine and the departed is part of the basic care" we humans have to bring to life.

People sometimes ask me if I believe in the resurrection and I tell them that I have to, not as a theological theory about what happens in the after-life but as a pastoral reality that has grown up around the experience of sitting with folks who are dealing with dead people who are very much alive.

And what I have discovered, is that simply trying to get those dead people to go away doesn't solve anything. Nor does it help to hold on to them in ways that keep us from living.

If we want to be healthy, Thomas Moore says, we have to find a way to grasp the mystery of the divine and the departed. Because, as Jesus says, "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living because in God – in the light of that energy that embraces us all -- death is not about being dead.

And living is not just about being alive. We talk a lot these days about one's "quality of life." And I think that's important as a way of thinking about our own lives.

But it's also important as a way of thinking about the life we leave behind us – our legacy.

If this election has taught us anything, it has to be that how we speak and how we act has a direct impact on our children.

Because here's the thing – none of us, whether we are married or not, or have children or not, none of us will die childless. The quality of our lives has a direct impact on the life to come.

Last Sunday I had the privilege of being at worship with our friends at First Baptist Church in Berkeley. It so happens that Pastor Nancy Hall was leading that service by telling some of the story of Rod Romney, our beloved pastor here for 20 years, and she lead us in singing some of Rod's hymns.

And, yes, we sang "Bring us Home." And Nancy started to cry. And then the woman next to me started to cry. And then I started to cry.

And I realized that Rod and Beverly may not have had any biological children of their own, but Rod did not die childless. The quality of his

life continues to flow through that song and through this deep longing for “home” and belonging and hope.

Death is not about being dead. And living is not just about being alive.

Yes, it is about quality of life. But it is also about legacy.

Whatever you believe about life after death, the truth is, none of us will die childless.

And those who “get it,” Jesus says are “like angels ... they are children of the resurrection.”

Now you know that Luke has a thing about angels.

It was an angel that appeared to the old priest Zechariah and said “Don’t be afraid; you and your wife Elizabeth will have a child.”

“How can this be,” Zechariah says, “given that we are so old?”

And then the angel goes to visit the young woman Mary and says, “Don’t be afraid; you will have a child.”

“How can this be,” she says, “given that I am so young and so unmarried?”

And then an angel appears to those haggard shepherds in a field one night – poor folks who may have given up on the hope of ever making any kind of mark on the world. And the angel says, “Don’t be afraid; for unto *you* is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior.”

“How is that possible?”

But those shepherds get up and go looking anyway and they become part of a story of hope that has been going on for 2000 years.

It's like Moses and that burning bush, Jesus says. Moses has left behind his political power in Egypt to tend sheep out in the wilderness. And an "*angel* appeared to him" in a burning bush and Moses hears this voice that says: "I have seen the misery of my people and have heard their cry and I will bring them up – I will raise them up – out of that place and bring them to a land flowing with milk and honey."

"How can this be?" Moses says.

And the voice says: "Don't be afraid because I am with you; I am the God of your ancestors;" I AM the energy of life itself."

Look. The religious-political leaders of the day got it wrong.  
Death is not about being dead.  
And living is about more than being alive.

No political campaign, no nasty rhetoric, no cynicism, no election, no death can shut it down. Because there is an energy that has been going on from the very beginning of time and is embracing us now with the power to do far more than we can ask or imagine.

That's the testimony we make today by naming those who have gone before us.

So when we look at the world and hear the misery and the suffering of those around us, listen too for a voice - the voice of angels - who whisper: "Don't panic; don't be afraid; all is not lost because the eternal energy of love can be born in you today."

And, right now, cutting through the noise of anger and confusion and fear, if you hear that voice – that beautiful whisper of love and hope -- do not harden your hearts.

#### NOTES

Thomas Moore, *Care of the Soul* (HarperCollins, 1992), p.xvii. Rod Romney's hymn, "Bring Us Home," is a Heritage Hymn of Seattle First Baptist Church.