

22ND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
NOVEMBER 6, 2022



LUKE 20:27-38
THE ORAL EXAM

*St. John United Church of Christ
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***CALL TO WORSHIP:**

ONE: The God who is greater than we will ever understand,

MANY: is humbled to become one of us.

The God who is more loving that our hearts dare imagine,

gives us more grace than we ever realize.

The God who is wiser than we will ever know,
teaches us all we need to become God's children.
Let us enter into worship together.

***INVOCATION:**

We take courage, O God, for your Spirit abides with us and we rejoice in your treasure that enriches the community inside these walls and online today in word and song, prayer and story, and the community of those who live around us and are blessed by this church, and those who will be blessed by them, and those who are always blessed by an expanding circle of love. Amen.

***CALL TO RECONCILIATION**

We often think God is 'out there' somewhere, distant and uncaring. But God hears our hearts, God shares our struggles, God walks with us as we try to be faithful disciples. Let us come to the One who is as close as the very breath we take in this moment to confess the brokenness of our lives. Please join me as we pray,

***UNISON PRAYER FOR FORGIVENESS:**

We are so easily confused by what the world tells us, Watching God, that we forget the stories of faith we heard as children. We are so fearful of tomorrow, we are not aware of your Spirit with us today. We are so busy wondering 'what if?' or 'suppose?' - we cannot hear the promises you whisper to us.

So once again, Gracious God, have mercy on us. You know our hearts so well - touch them with your grace. You see our deepest fears - heal them with your peace. You hear our secret longings - speak to them of your hope. This we pray in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

Silence is kept

***ASSURANCE OF PARDON:**

The One who searches our broken hearts has found the way to mend them and make us new people. The good news is that everything God has done in Christ is for us, that we might be made whole. With kindness and with justice, God makes us new

people. We will sing our thanks through all eternity. Great is God and greatly to be praised! Amen.

FIRST TESTAMENT LESSON: Haggai 1:15b-2:9

The prophet Haggai promises that the glories of the rebuilt temple will outshine the glories of the temple now in ruins.

Encouraging the people

2 On the twenty-first day of the seventh month, the LORD's word came through Haggai the prophet: ² Say to Judah's governor Zerubbabel, Shealtiel's son, and to the chief priest Joshua, Jehozadak's son, and to the rest of the people:

³ Who among you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Doesn't it appear as nothing to you?

⁴ So now, be strong, Zerubbabel, says the LORD. Be strong, High Priest Joshua, Jehozadak's son, and be strong, all you people of the land, says the LORD. Work, for I am with you, says the LORD of heavenly forces. ⁵ As with our agreement when you came out of Egypt, my spirit stands in your midst. Don't fear.

⁶ This is what the LORD of heavenly forces says: In just a little while, I will make the heavens, the earth, the sea, and the dry land quake. ⁷ I will make

all the nations quake. The wealth of all the nations will come. I will fill this house with glory, says the LORD of heavenly forces.

⁸The silver and the gold belong to me, says the LORD of heavenly forces.⁹This house will be more glorious than its predecessor, says the LORD of heavenly forces. I will provide prosperity in this place, says the LORD of heavenly forces.

EPISTLE LESSON: 2 Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17

Words of the Apostle Paul Day of the Lord

2 Brothers and sisters, we have a request for you concerning our Lord Jesus Christ's coming and when we are gathered together to be with him. ²We don't want you to be easily confused in your mind or upset if you hear that the day of the Lord is already here, whether you hear it through some spirit, a message, or a letter supposedly from us. ³Don't let anyone deceive you in any way. That day won't come unless the rebellion comes first and the person who is lawless is revealed, who is headed for destruction. ⁴He is the opponent of every so-called god or object of worship and promotes himself over them. So he sits in God's temple, displaying himself to show that he is God. ⁵You remember that I used to tell you these things while I was with you, don't you?

Prayer of thanks and encouragement

¹³ But we always must thank God for you, brothers and sisters who are loved by God. This is because he chose you from the beginning to be the first crop of the harvest. This brought salvation, through your dedication to God by the Spirit and through your belief in the truth. ¹⁴ God called all of you through our good news so you could possess the honor of our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁵ So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold on to the traditions we taught you, whether we taught you in person or through our letter. ¹⁶ Our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father loved us and through grace gave us eternal comfort and a good hope. ¹⁷ May he encourage your hearts and give you strength in every good thing you do or say.

***GOSPEL LESSON: Luke 20:27-38**

Question about the resurrection

²⁷ Some Sadducees, who deny that there's a resurrection, came to Jesus and asked, ²⁸ "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that *if a man's brother dies leaving a widow but no children, the brother must marry the widow and raise up children for his brother.*^[a] ²⁹ Now there were seven brothers. The first man married a woman and then died childless. ³⁰ The

second³¹ and then the third brother married her. Eventually all seven married her, and they all died without leaving any children.³² Finally, the woman died too.³³ In the resurrection, whose wife will she be? All seven were married to her.”

³⁴ Jesus said to them, “People who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage.³⁵ But those who are considered worthy to participate in that age, that is, in the age of the resurrection from the dead, won’t marry nor will they be given in marriage.³⁶ They can no longer die, because they are like angels and are God’s children since they share in the resurrection.³⁷ Even Moses demonstrated that the dead are raised—in the passage about the burning bush, when he speaks of the Lord as *the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob*.^[b]³⁸ He isn’t the God of the dead but of the living. To him they are all alive.”

These are the Ancient Words revealed to us anew.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

MESSAGE: “What if?”

Luke 20:27-38 comes in the narrative of Jesus’s final days in Jerusalem, where his ministry of bringing good news to the poor and freeing the oppressed will abruptly end with his crucifixion. His death sentence

will result in part from conflicts with representatives of various groups of political and religious leaders, who question his interpretation of Torah, his authority to teach at all, and his loyalty to the Roman Empire. Jesus responds by continually turning the tables on his interlocutors, showing them how the reign of God that he proclaims upends their expectations of God’s work in the world.

In this context of his impending death, some Sadducees pose a question to Jesus about the resurrection. It’s important in understanding this passage to keep in mind that the question posed about the resurrection came not from bereaved persons seeking hope or from believers searching for more clarity on the doctrine. Rather, Jesus is being interrogated by persons who already were fixed in their position that there was no resurrection.

Unlike the Pharisees, the Sadducees did not believe in an end-time resurrection of the dead—a conviction clearly noted at the outset of the passage (Luke 20:27). This signals that the question they subsequently pose to Jesus about the details of resurrection life has a purpose other than to learn new information or rethink their current position on the afterlife.

The specific scenario they raise apparently involves “levirate marriage,” described in

Deuteronomy 25:5–10, in which the brother of a deceased man is to marry his brother's widow in order to produce a child who will perpetuate his brother's name. They portray an extreme situation in which a woman cycles through seven brothers as husbands who all die without having a child with her, then she herself dies.

The Sadducees then ask Jesus whose wife the woman will be in the resurrection, since all seven had her as his wife in this life. They appear to be setting Jesus up for embarrassment or to discredit his teaching, since any attempt to answer the question at face value would reveal the ridiculousness of belief in an embodied resurrection. Would this play out like a bad eschatological episode of *The Bachelorette*, in which the woman never has the option to narrow the field of suitors down to just one?

Jesus's response to this preposterous question is striking for a couple of reasons.

First, one might be surprised that he responds at all. Assuming he senses that the Sadducees' question is less-than-sincere, he might simply walk away. But Jesus is known for his willingness to engage even those who misunderstand or outright oppose him.

Second, Jesus's response not only affirms his conviction that God does in fact raise the dead, but does so by showing that the same Moses to whom the Sadducees appeal for the law of levirate marriage also spoke of the reality of the resurrection. In addition to portraying Jesus as a skilled interpreter of the Torah, this move also identifies some common ground between Jesus and his interlocutors that might possibly allow him to expand their thinking on the matter. If the concern expressed in levirate marriage is for a man to have a type of "afterlife" through his offspring, then Jesus shows how this hope is ultimately realized in a new age characterized by God raising the dead to imperishable lives as "children of God" (Luke 20:36). If it were not so, then how could Moses speak of the Lord as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who all died before Moses lived, since God is God of the living, not the dead? In fact, Jesus declares that the very issue that brought about levirate marriage—death—will itself be abolished.

Jesus thus moves beyond simply clarifying a point of doctrinal debate among first-century Jewish people to refocusing his audience's attention on the very character of God, who graciously gives eternal life that is more glorious than anything humans know in this world or even have the capacity to

comprehend. God is the Merciful One who makes people worthy to enter the age of the resurrection through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The Sadducees, the Christians Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians 15, and many people today have a hard time envisioning a bodily resurrection. But the good news is that the limitations of human imagination do not constrain God's ability to create the "impossible."

Jesus's response to the Sadducees ultimately draws all who listen into the big picture of the eschatological future that God calls us into and that was already being ushered into the world through Jesus's proclamation and enactment of God's reign. Jesus's affirmation of resurrection life while facing his own death makes it all the more powerful. Not only does it give credible assurance that death is not ultimate, but it also places in proper perspective the disagreements and trials people face in this life, calling them to focus on the faithfulness of the God who brings new life out of all sorts of deaths. There are times when we might find ourselves at times in a position like that of the Sadducees (or even Jesus's closest disciples) when you ask Jesus questions and do not get direct responses, or discover that he is actually disrupting the underlying assumptions of your questions, the "what ifs". Or perhaps the new, transformed life

Jesus promises seems like a fantasy amidst illness, death, or conflict in the world.

We should allow this week's text encourage us that the Risen Christ is present and working to bringing healing, hope, and direction in ways we do not always see or that we may not currently understand. Like with his response to the Sadducees that invited them to think beyond the constraints of the current order of things, perhaps Jesus will help us see possibilities not yet imagined and might defy our expectations. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER:

Be near to us who pray, O God, by the Spirit enabling us to be true and reverent. Shape our desires that we may seek your will and the salvation which includes others with us.

God of the living, we praise you for all you have done for us. God of the burning bush, Lord of the empty tomb, Spirit of life; in living prevent us from being consumed by our passions; in dying save us from despair; and after our death raise us to everlasting life in company with all your people.

God of justice, compassion, and love, we are grateful for all judges, legislators, and executives who are devoted to justice in action and not merely in

words. We give thanks for all who have shown compassion on widows and widowers and have provided for them when they were in want. We ask your compassion on all those on our prayer list, and all those in harms way around the world. May they feel your presence in the people who are giving them aid. We pray all these things in the name of Jesus our Christ and Savior . . .

THE LORD'S PRAYER:

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

INVITATION TO GENEROSITY: We are invited to offer financial resources, time, abilities, compassion, in a tangible expression of our hope for the future of the indoor and outdoor of this community of faith and for many others near and far away. Be generous, my friends, with your trust in the future.

***UNISON PRAYER OF DEDICATION/OFFERING:**

Truth be told, Holy God, we are often afraid that you will misuse the gifts we offer - bringing hope to

those who deserve none, feeding those who could be working, looking after those who are coddled too much. Forgive our fearfulness. After all, you entrusted these gifts to us in the first place! In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

***HOLY COMMUNION:**

***GREAT PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING**

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

People of God, lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the One who heals our brokenness.

Let us offer our thanks to God, who has prepared this Table for us.

We will bless the One who offers us life in every moment.

We thank you for your greatness, God of the living, and fall silent. When there was only chaos, you whispered your Word, and creation sprang forth.

The sun and the stars filled the heavens with your splendor, and the earth sang your glory. You filled us with your dreams of life with you forever, but we confused your hopes with our desires and went chasing after the seductions of sin and death.

You sent the prophets to remind us of the stories

we had been told as your children, but we thought them to be myths and fables. So once again, you sent your Word to speak sense to our lives.

Therefore, in this time and place, with those who have gone before, and those who will come after, we join in the song of all creation:

Holy, holy, holy are you, God of unsearchable greatness! The glorious splendor of your creation sings your praises.

Hosanna in the highest!

Blessed is the One who comes according to the promises made.

Hosanna in the highest!

Holy are you, God of understanding, and blessed is Jesus Christ, your Son. When we had been deafened by the songs of the world, he came to speak of hope, and to offer us justice.

When we were easily confused by the promises of sin, he came to make clear your dreams for us. When we thought we could save ourselves, he offered himself on the cross, that we might spend eternity in your presence.

As we come to the Table of grace, as we are offered all your gifts, we remember what Christ has done for us:

**Christ died, holding fast to God's promises;
Christ was raised, opposing the so-called god death;
Christ will return to fill our hearts with splendor.**

Send your Spirit upon the gifts of the bread and the cup, and upon your children who gather in this place. Place into our empty hands your Bread made with life and mercy, that we might take justice and peace to the outcasts of our world.

Fill our parched hearts with the Cup of grace, that we might be poured out for the broken and lost in these times and places. Heal us with the peace of this joyous feast, that we might become your people of hope.

Then, when this world passes away, and time has come to an end, we will gather around the Table in your kingdom of grace, singing our praises to you for all eternity, God in Community, Holy in One. Amen.

SHARING THE ELEMENTS:

***UNISON PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING:**

We give thanks, almighty God, that you have refreshed us at your table by granting us the presence of Jesus Christ. Strengthen our faith, increase our love for one another, and send us forth

into the world in courage and peace, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit; through Jesus Christ our Savior, Amen.

***BENEDICTION:**

In the sixth day of the eleventh month, the one with a fall-back gift-hour, God blesses us all to be prophets, so we can lift people's memories, stir people's courage, confident that God's Spirit abides within us, and that we need not fear for God fills this house with splendor looking out of every face.

PRAYER LIST: Urban Baum, David Seneczyn, Warren Neff, Carol White, Cheri Schutzenhofer, Theo Mally, Jane Reiss, Sandy Fort, Becky Ballard, Rosemary Williams, Larry Wagner.