

## *God of the Living*

Psalm 98; Luke 20:27-38  
Lewinsville Presbyterian Church  
The Rev. Dr. Scott Ramsey  
November 6, 2022 – All Saints' Sunday

Have you ever had a mentor or a teacher, someone whose life expressed the kind of joy and grace and kindness that embodied the good life, a life lived with God, a life that showed you what was possible in life? One of these persons for me is someone I've mentioned to you all before, a teacher of mine in seminary named Shirley Guthrie, who died in 2004. Shirley was a genius of a theological scholar; he did his Ph.D. work with Karl Barth at the University of Basel in Switzerland. He was funny, and he was very, very kind. One of my classmates said that what she most loved about Shirley was that you could just tell that he loved Jesus. In theology class one time, we were talking about the resurrection and the New Testament's view of heaven. Shirley said something about heaven that has become fundamental to my own thinking about heaven and about the life of the resurrection. He said, "Whatever you think heaven is going to be like, heaven is going to be far better than anything you can possibly comprehend."

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Now, Shirley was not simply saying that if you think heaven is going to be like winning a *million* dollars, it's actually going to be like winning a *billion* dollars. Heaven is not simply going to be an extension of life as we know it, not simply taking something that we know and then raising it to the nth degree.

As my dear friend, Tom Schmid used to say, quoting the legendary Roman Catholic theologian Hans Kung, "the resurrection is never to be understood as resuscitation, as the return from sleep to the previous state of things. The resurrection is a radical transformation into an utterly new state of being." The resurrection and the kingdom of heaven and the communion of saints are about the radical transformation of life as we know it, into the wondrous purposes of God.

In our text today from Luke 20, Jesus is approached by a group of religious leaders known as the Sadducees. The Sadducees were Jewish aristocrats who were known from making political convenient compromises with the Roman imperial authorities. They did not, the text says, believe in the resurrection. One wonders whether part of the reason why they did not believe in the resurrection was because of the inherently subversive and transformative nature of the resurrection, for when you

are at the top of the social power structure, the radical transformation of life as we know it may not be what you are looking for.

They ask Jesus a question about the resurrection that they seem to believe is designed perfectly to force Jesus to acknowledge that the resurrection cannot be. "Moses teaches us that if a man's brother dies, leaving a wife but no children, then the man shall marry the widow, and raise us children for his brother. Well, imagine that there were seven brothers; the first married, and died childless; then the second and the third married her, and so in the same way all seven died childless. In the resurrection, whose wife will the woman be? For all seven had married her." They want to engage Jesus in verbal combat and to leave him in a withering and humiliating defeat.

But it turns out that Jesus is not threatened at all by their intellectual wizardry, and he tells them that they are missing the entire point. The resurrection is not simply like overtime. It is not simply an extension of life, under the same conditions that we know now. It is a radical transformation into an utterly new state of being, into a way of life that is deeper and brighter and better than we can possibly comprehend. As Jesus says in our text, in the resurrection, "they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection."

On All Saints' Sunday, the church celebrates the mystery of the communion of saints, which is about the radical transformation of life. We remember the lives of those who have come before us, including those very dear to us whom we have lost. We do not need to fully comprehend the mystery of the communion of saints in order to draw energy and courage from the ways that the saints are present with us, in some mysterious way, to encourage and cheer us on, as we make our way, as we face our challenges, as we follow Jesus in our day. The life of the resurrection - the transformation of life as we know it - is coming to us and is coming into our world: healing the broken, opening the eyes of those who cannot see clearly, bringing good news to the poor, and delivering new life to people and organizations that have become like dead. The life of heaven is far better than anything we can possibly comprehend. To God and to God alone be all the glory. Amen.