

Sermon 2007 Pentecost 24 (Proper 27)  
Text: Luke 20:27-40  
Theme: "Whose Kingdom Is It Again?"

The Sadducees were not simply well-intentioned people who were trying to understand a teaching that was different from their own. They were guilty of unbelief. They tried to mold and shape the teaching of God to suit their own ideas.

"In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had her as wife." This is not a question seeking truth; it is a probe that seeks a weak spot in Jesus' teaching. The Sadducees would like nothing better than to have Jesus incriminate himself. We ask lots of questions like that and the question betrays our unbelief, our secret belief that we are superior to God and that if his ways don't fit into our conception of the universe, then we have no obligation to follow him.

The Sadducees are not asking, "How does God's kingdom come?" They are asking, "How do we make the kingdom of God be the way we want it to be?" The Sadducees do not believe in resurrection of the dead. God has promised throughout the Scriptures that at the last day, all the dead will rise. The Sadducees did not believe this seemed at all possible, so they chose not to believe it. They instead believed that every human being was here only for temporal life, so he had better

grab all the gusto he can because once you died, it's over. So, as you can see, the Sadducees would have fit in quite nicely in the 21<sup>st</sup> century USA. Religion is a nice crutch for those who need it but if one is bright, well read and financially successful, he doesn't really need it, does he? That's why our product is so difficult to sell my friends. No one wants to buy sand in the middle of the desert. Often, the challenge is not so much to get people to see the glorious gifts of God as to convince them that they even need them.

The Sadducees were seeking to design a God for themselves. They wanted God to do things the way they wanted them done. The Sadducees don't really want God at all; they want someone or something that will give them credibility and promote their agenda.

We all have a tendency to want to shape God into our own image. Some Christians look at a statue of a crucifix and feel like they are looking at God through his work on the cross. Some look at a statue of a Godly saint and feel as though they see God through the work of that saint. But the majority of Christians act as though they see God best when they look in a mirror. It is handy for God to be in our image because then we can be the authority of what is to be believed and what can be ignored.

Perhaps that's why Jesus teaches us to pray to "Our Father", rather than just to a generic god. A father is a person. He has a specific role. A father stands for specific things. Jesus says in our Gospel today, "All live to him" (v 38). That is to say, God is Father to all. He is God, and the kingdom is his. The Christian faith is not ours to form and mold according to what is expedient for us.

Luther says in the Small Catechism, "The kingdom of God certainly comes by itself without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may come to us also. *How does God's kingdom come?* God's kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity."

The kingdom of God is a gift from God and it comes as a whole thing, not in bits and pieces that we can accept or ignore at will. God comes to us by faith worked by Holy Spirit. We can't manufacture or create this faith. In fact, the wisdom of God seems silly to us. How can people rise from the dead? How can sinners be saved by the blood of Jesus?

In the Exodus from Egypt, the Israelites sought to bring about God's kingdom their way, but to no avail. God delivered Israel from

their bondage in Egypt in his way and in his time. Likewise, in his time and in his way, God delivered us from our bondage of slavery to sin.

Christians fall into a trap that has reoccurred again and again throughout history. Our heavenly Father has given us everything that we need to support this body and life. He gives us our faith, and by his Holy Spirit, he brings us into his kingdom. These works are all his grace and mercy. Yet Christians are always seeking more logical explanations and more predictable outcomes than one has when relying on something as intangible as faith.

We talk faith but panic when things turn out differently from how we had wanted. We talk faith but nearly have hysterics when our kid gets cut from the team, or brings home a "F." We talk faith but conveniently ignore the Bible when it does not affirm our sinful choices. We become Sadducees. We ignore the grace of God and ultimately refuse to call him Father. We attempt to control a kingdom that does not belong to us but to our Father.

Thank God that God is so gracious, that his kingdom comes even without our participation. God's kingdom comes to us in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. When Jesus was born, Wise Men from the East sought him. They looked for the King of the Jews. When Jesus was on

trial, his enemies accused him of claiming to be King. Pilate asked him whether he was King, and Jesus proclaimed he was. At Jesus' crucifixion, the charge against him was nailed to the cross as he was nailed to the cross. The charge read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." King Jesus is the incarnation of his kingdom. Jesus is the Kingdom of God in flesh. Where the King is, there is his kingdom.

From those wounds, caused by the nails, flowed the holy and precious blood of God's own Son, the King of the Jews. The kingdom of God had come among men, and it was not recognized. As the Sadducees refused to believe in the resurrection of the dead, the people who gathered at the cross of Christ, Jews and Gentiles alike, refused to believe he was King.

Yet their unbelief did not make the King's death any less real. Their unbelief did not make the King's death any less effective. Their unbelief did not stop either the King or the kingdom from coming. And unbelief does not stop the Father from expanding his kingdom today through Word and Sacrament. Some do not believe that God's kingdom comes in such simple and humble ways. Word, water, bread, wine – too simple; too easy. Yet this is how the Father has promised his kingdom would come. By Word and Sacrament, God the Holy Spirit

creates, nurtures, and sustains faith. Don't let the Sadducee in you lead you astray. God is bigger than we imagine and can do things beyond our understanding. Faith simply beholds the gracious work of the Father, who causes his kingdom to come by the Holy Spirit and rejoices in the fact that everything is always just as God says it will be. He is our one true foundation in this crumbling world. AMEN.