

No Matter What ~ November 07, 2010
Luke 20:27-38; Psalm 98

If you have ever attended a funeral or memorial service that I have handled, you know that I always begin the service by quoting a passage from Paul's Letter to the Romans which says:

*If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord;
 So, then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.*

Paul's words are basically the same Jesus used when the Sadducees confronted him.

The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection. This particular sect of the Jewish faith based its belief system only on the Pentateuch or Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures, which contained the law. They did not consider the prophets or the writings as authoritative. The eternal life they believed in was of an earthly nature. They believed they would live on through their descendents.

To try and trap Jesus was their goal. Jesus had been tested before by the religious authorities of his day. They were troubled by the band of followers this man was gathering around himself and the new way he had of looking at their religious beliefs, especially the law. As we all know, he stressed the importance of considering the "spirit of the law" instead of the "letter of the law." This allowed for a broad interpretation in religious matters.

In any authoritarian structure, freedom of thought is not encouraged. Following the rules and regulations is the safe way to keep everything and everyone under control. This Jesus was threatening all that they knew and held dear. So, the questions came hot and heavy and the desire was to catch him off guard, to make him look foolish and to keep them in power.

If we take a close look at the questions posed to him and the answers he gave, we see that he was the one who must have enjoyed this game. He often managed to turn the questions back on the ones doing the asking, or would answer in a parable that would leave them wondering just what it was he had said. They often missed the point.

The hypothetical question about the widow and her seven husbands must have made Jesus shake his head ever so slightly. He knew that the Sadducees were out to trap him, as were the scribes and the Pharisees. Our reading takes place following his last entrance into Jerusalem, so his fate was already sealed.

He told his questioners that there is no marrying in heaven so there was no point to their question. He also went on to remind them that in the eyes of God all are alive. Whether they lived or whether they died they were the Lord's. His questioners decided not to ask him any more questions but quietly left him. They certainly could not argue with what he told them.

It has always been a comfort to me to believe that whether I live or whether I die I am in the presence of God. I owe this all to Mrs. Allen, my fourth grade Sunday school teacher, who had me believing that God was always looking over my shoulder no matter what. That has always been a powerful image for me, to have God moving along right

beside me and knowing all that I did or didn't do. Very often this thought made me stop in my tracks and rethink a pathway I was about to take. Sometimes, this took a lot of fun out of life, but I have had no regrets over paths taken.

Jesus always hoped he could make people stop in their tracks and consider where they were in life and where they were going. He asked, in many ways, that we look at our relationship with God and consider ways in which we could improve it. He wanted us to know that leading a life that considered what it was God desired of us was worthwhile. His life and his teachings pointed the way to having a closer walk with our Creator.

The Pharisees and the scribes and the Sadducees could not see beyond the words printed on the pages of the scriptures they followed. They could not see that the words and Jesus pointed beyond themselves to God. Had they known this they would have taken the opportunity to enrich their faith and learn better ways to live life. They would have understood that they had a God who loved them all on both sides of death. We do, too.

-- *Amen*