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“Acting Your Age” **Sermon on Luke 20:27-38**

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Last week, Jesus was passing through Jericho on his way to Jerusalem, but then he stopped to see the tax collector, Zacchaeus. In today's scripture, we find that Jesus has made it to Jerusalem, which means he is drawing ever nearer to his death.

What caused his death? Well, since he has arrived in Jerusalem, Luke has people asking him questions to try to trip Jesus up and to turn public opinion against him. Why? He was a threat. Why? Maybe they feared the crowds. Why? Maybe he was different and yet had authority. Why? Maybe, he was acting his age. I'll try to explain.

From Luke 20: 27-38

²⁷ Some Sadducees, those who say there is no resurrection, came to him ²⁸ 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. ²⁹ Now there were seven brothers; the first married a woman and died childless; ³⁰ then the second ³¹ and the third married her, and so in the same way all seven died childless. ³² Finally the woman also died. ³³ In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had married her.”

³⁴ Jesus said to them, “Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage, ³⁵ but those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. ³⁶ Indeed, they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection. ³⁷ 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, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. ³⁸ Now he is God not of the dead but of the living, for to him all of them are alive.”

“Those who belong to this age...” says Jesus. And those who belong to that age...are like angels, ...children of God, ...children of the resurrection. This age. That age. Your age. Every age comes with an expectation.

When you were a baby, people expected you to act your age and you did. But, the ages change, and there comes a time when acting like a baby is not of the right age.

And so it goes when someone whines on a beautiful day like today that the Lord has made. “Why do I have to go to church? I don’t want to go to church. They never talk about anything that has to do with me. I don’t get it! Why do I have to go? Bobby doesn’t go. Why do I have to go?” “Well, because you’re my husband and I think you really need to go.” The desire is for the “whining one” to act “his age.” When I say, “his age,” I mean the age of Jesus.

Jesus speaks of ages when he responds to that question from the Sadducees about the resurrection. He has to know something is up, because, as Luke told us, Sadducees don’t “believe in the resurrection,” and that’s why they were “sad, you see.”

He had to know something was up with the question about the resurrection from Sadducees. He had to know it was a childish question just by the sound of it. It’s about widows and death, a serious thing. But this widow had seven husbands. You can’t be serious? Come on! If I were the seventh husband, I’d sleep with one eye open and eat my meals out. Something’s up!

Why the question? Why the desire to entrap Jesus?

I believe that those who live in the age of religion understand their religion as the best. You have to advocate at all costs. Nobody’s better than your religion! Are they afraid that they’ll take away their religion? Who would advocate for a second-rate theology, a second-rate god?

In my life, I have gone into every theological debate knowing full well that I have a superior understanding of God. You do the same thing! Of all the places to worship in Nashville on Sunday morning, you have chosen here. You didn’t come here because one day you hope to be smart enough to be a Baptist. No, you have arrived. And I think if we are really quiet, we can hear the Episcopalians down the road praying that one day they’ll be Presbyterians, too. Can you hear that?

The Sadducees are of the same age. They believe that they have arrived, and their aim is to make Jesus into one of them. Because Jesus is wrong. No resurrection.

What is right is a Sadducee. They have a Bible that is five books long - Genesis to Deuteronomy. The books of Moses. That’s it. In those books, you will learn that you are God’s chosen people. And in those books, you will learn the law and to how to live as God’s chosen people. That’s all you need to know!

We know, because as I said, those of us who live in the age of religion, we know that the Sadducees are wrong. You can’t limit God to just five books of the Bible, not when there’s a whole Bible.

But in saying that, I know some Christians who live by only half a page of the Bible. Those are the people who show up once a year on Christmas Eve and take your pew. What they hear on that evening is that God is a baby. They come year after year because that's what they need to hear. It's a beautiful passage. What's not to love about a baby? Unless you're sitting next to one on an airplane. But this is Jesus - no crying he makes. The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay. They just need some peace and quiet; they just need half a chapter, that's all. Peace.

Then some of them, but not all, will show up again on Easter, because they believe in the resurrection. What's not to love about the resurrection morning? The room smells like lilies and new clothes. And whatever that chemical is that goes into dry cleaning. If it's toxic, it's a pleasant toxic. Brass and friends. And off to grandmother's house we go for ham, biscuits, and banana pudding.

Birth and resurrection – that's all people need from the Bible – but that's not you. Your Bible has more breadth. Unless you're gone for the summer, and fall break, and spring break, and the Titan's game, and Martin Luther King weekend, and...

But the Bible isn't just church. Going to church doesn't mean you don't have a full Bible. I don't know about you, but there are passages in the Bible that I read, but skip over when it comes to implementation. That one about, "Do not judge, lest you be judged." That one about "Forgive your neighbor seven times seventy." Do you believe that? "Sell all that you have and follow me." Who believes that? "Do not even be angry with your brother or sister." Have you ever pulled that one out on your spouse?

It's the age in which we live. We limit God to that which suits the way we live and move and have our being.

I think in our scripture today, Jesus is trying to get us to act his age. By that, I mean believing in the age of the resurrection. Now that's more than just a mental hurdle. "I believe in the resurrection." It's more than that. It's knowing that nothing can separate us from the love of God. Not even death.

You see that in Jesus. He acts his age. His age has no fear. He's not afraid to break over the borders. He's not afraid to touch the untouchable. He's not afraid to love the unlovable. He's not afraid to speak the truth to people who have become accustomed to the taste of lies.

He's not afraid. Nothing can separate him from the love of God. Not even death. He lives in the age of the resurrection. He knows he's going to die. But he knows - resurrection. That's a powerful thing.

We need to act his age. There's no better time. There's a lot of fear out there. There's a lot of anger out there. There's a lot of death and destruction. You can make all of that stuff your religion. Or you become people of his age, children of the resurrection. Children who do not fear giving their life for others because they know it doesn't run out – the love of God. It's why we're here. You can let it all go and trust that even if the world buries us deep as a bone, even there, God will find us, and God's right hand shall raise us up.

I was looking at the list of names in the bulletin. They're not a list of names. Every single one of them lived moments of eternal light. They acted that age. John Cowan. He lived a life of ministry. A pastor that cared for so many. He was there, no matter the time of day. Blind and deaf, remember him? He'd sit right there, we'd say a prayer, and before anyone knew it, he'd say, "Amen!" I don't know how he heard it! His wife, Dakie, dear Dakie, always sending some kind note to lift up the soul. Living and acting in that age of the resurrection.

Mae Hodge. She could bring high heels and painted nails into the Green Hills Kroger and from it the Kingdom of Heaven would just show up. At Krogers! She lived his age at Krogers, knowing everyone's name. She befriended everyone there. Folks from Krogers came to her memorial service. I hate grocery shopping. You all look into my cart to see what I'm buying; you know, it's none of your business! And then I have a little bit of claustrophobia, and Kroger seems to be where all the spatially unaware gather, and they close in on me. But she found it to be a place of light, the eternal.

Every name on the list! They acted the age of Jesus.

Barbara Haynes. She met a judge who was so disparaging about her client. So disparaging about people who have a mental illness. He was awful with the words he used, "Mongoloids." She had enough and ran for judge...and was elected as the first woman to be a judge. She ran as a human being who knew what age to live in.

Gracie Allen. She taught physical education. A student said about her, "Not only did she care about her students' physical health, but their mental health, too." Sacrificing her time for their time... eye to eye... to care, to invest. Children of the resurrection.

Jodie Folk. Worked on every Habitat house. Made countless trips down to the Gulf for hurricane relief. Always ending a conversation with, "What can I do for you?"

And so it is, the bells on the banner. I hear them ringing down the aisle and these people are alive. They're alive!

I can hear them now; I can hear them all now cheering us on to act the age of Jesus. Can't you hear them? "What can I do for you?"

He said, "I know. I'll give my life for you." Resurrection.