

22nd Sunday after Pentecost – Proper 27, Year C
A Sermon Preached by The Rev Eric Zubler
on November 9, 2025

Job 19:23-27a / Psalm 17:1-9 / 2 Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17 / Luke 20:27-38

This morning we are looking at a story that gives us a deeper look into what Jesus faced as he continued his earthly ministry in the ancient world. To discuss this story effectively we need to look at some of the other participants. The question posed to Jesus is given by a group of Jewish religious authorities called the Sadducees. They are described in my research as an aristocratic group, who like most of the authorities, were very skeptical of this young rabbi, Jesus.

What differentiates the Sadducees from other Jews of the time is their lack of belief in an afterlife. In fact, there is a fun way to differentiate the Sadducees from the Pharisees: Due to their lack of belief in an afterlife the Sadducees were “sad, you see?” Yes, that is an oversimplification, but for most of our purposes it is an easy means of putting into context one group of Jewish authorities over another.

Anyhow, the Sadducees did not believe there was anything beyond this earthly life, and so the question they pose to Jesus would have been a rhetorical question for them – but one they had perhaps pondered themselves. In my very limited contact with the Jewish faith I have learned that its members love a good session of pondering rhetorical questions through active debate and discussion. This might happen in a formal setting at their Temple or just over a cup of coffee at Starbucks.

Whatever the case, Jesus is tagged with the Sadducee’s question of day...You heard it in the Gospel and the question is not really the point of reading this story. The point is the one Jesus makes when he says: “Those who are considered worthy of taking part in the age to come, and in the resurrection from the dead, will neither marry nor be given in marriage, and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels.”

Well if there is good news today, it certainly is that we will all be “like” the angels – Note: it doesn’t say we will be angels, but that we will be like the angels. I guess I could settle into that for eternity...Our primary job, on this side of heaven, becomes to be “considered worthy of taking part in the age to come.” How do we get to that point is our question to ponder today as those ancient Sadducees did in Jesus’s day.

My father was raised in a day and age when the sisters at his grade school told them sins were like marbles in a jar. Actually two jars, one is full of marbles and one is empty. Each time a sin is committed a marble moves to the empty jar, each time you do something good a marble can move back to the full jar. Assuming the first jar still has the majority of your marbles you are as Jesus puts it: “considered worthy of taking part in the age to come.” That is a VERY literal, black and white/good vs. bad way of looking at sin and redemption...requiring us to perform physical actions to reserve our spot in eternity.

Hopefully each and every one of us know we are dealing with a god who offers unconditional love to all. In fact, Jesus goes on to say...“We become God’s children, since they are children of the Resurrection.” Children...I think we can all say, are universally loved unconditionally by their parents – no parent I know of would say they no longer love their child. We may not love everything they do, but we do love them unconditionally, as only a parent can, for ever and ever.

For myself that answers the question – God is a parent who loves me unconditionally, no matter what I do, I am loved and forgiven, always, full stop...so are you loved and forgiven for ever! There is little we can do – no marbles to move from jar to jar, no “good deeds” we can do to somehow “EARN” our way into a heavenly home. No, you cannot give all your money to a charitable cause and earn a heavenly reward. No, you cannot volunteer each week at the homeless shelter, or do other good deeds to EARN your eternal reward.

Instead, all that our Triune God asks of us is to be in relationship on an ongoing basis with God, not if we feel like it, or when we are here in Church – but everywhere we go, as much as possible. Certainly, that means regularly coming here to Church, but it also means admitting the error in our ways, and hopefully being able to change those

ways...The act of Confession, with God's absolution, coming up this morning, will be our chance to be in relationship with God – to join those who God considers God's children.

I grew up outside of Chicago in a wooded neighborhood in the sand dunes along the shores of Lake Michigan. Back in the middle decades of the last century Al Capone had a home there, it was, well still is, shaped like a pistol. Like many of the older homes there it is white stucco on the outside, which was sort of code that someone associated with organized crime likely resided there. One unlikely house deep in the woods however, was a simple Dutch Colonial, not unlike the one my mom grew up in an hour or so away.

The Dutch Colonial in my neighborhood however was a bit different...it was surrounded by a chain-link fence and there were flood lights on the house and up in the trees. There was even a guard house in one corner of the fenced backyard up on a wooded sand dune. As children we had little idea who lived there, only that as we rode past on our bikes that house stood out from the typical post-war ranch-style homes on our street. We finally found who lived there when the new entrance road to the nearby Roman Catholic Church was named Thomas J. Burke Drive.

It seems Thomas J. Burke was who lived in the mysterious Dutch Colonial and upon his death he confessed his sins to a priest and then left a large sum to that local Catholic parish. Some might call this a "Deathbed conversion." Now, I don't know if I will finally meet Thomas J. Burke in heaven, but I do know that what happened between him and his priest is really between him and God. Far be it from me to judge whether being in his deathbed with a priest at his side converted Mr. Burke or not.

What I do know is that Mr. Burke and all of us have a Lord and Savior who is ready, willing, and able to take us back, welcome us back, unconditionally, into the household of God, or maybe I should family of God. It all really up to us, to be a part of the family of God. Be like Zacchaeus in last Sunday's lesson, who changed his ways, and welcomed God into his household when Jesus came, and called upon him to change his life for good, to admit the errors of his ways.

So, yes, please question who and how you get to heaven. Ponder what you do, if it is a part of God's plan for you, and then revel in the conversations, maybe informally with family and friends, or more formally with Father Ian, or in a Bible study or other classroom setting. The important thing is to contemplate, to figure out what challenges your heart to be more and more a part of whomever God is calling you to, in this world and in the next.

AMEN.