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Gospel lesson

Immediately after the question about paying taxes from last week, Jesus fielded a question from some Sadducees about resurrection of the dead. This brings us to:



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/lumo-authority/>;
courtesy of Lumo Project Films - www.lumoproject.com

Matthew 22:34-46

NRSVue

³⁴ When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together,

³⁵ and one of them, an expert in the law, asked him a question to test him.

³⁶ “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?”

³⁷ He said to him, “ ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’

³⁸ This is the greatest and first commandment.

³⁹ And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’

⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

⁴¹ Now while the Pharisees were gathered together,

Jesus asked them this question:

⁴² “What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?” They said to him, “The son of David.”

⁴³ He said to them, “How is it then that David by the Spirit calls him Lord, saying,

⁴⁴ ‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet” ’?

⁴⁵ “If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?”

⁴⁶ No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

The word of God for the people of God

<Children’s/Interactive time>



picture from <https://news.lafayette.edu/2022/03/24/disabilities-awareness-week-presents-opportunities-to-learn-support-engage/>

We are observing Disabilities Awareness Sunday today. What is a disability? <Let them respond>

What does a disability look like? <Let them respond>



pictures from <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10235530228664062&set=a.4499793900659>

Not all disabilities are physical or obvious. Many

people prefer to hide their struggles, whether physical or mental, from other people. Is a person with a disability less than human? <Let them respond>

Does a person with a disability have less of a soul in God's eyes? <Let them respond>

What is the right way to treat a person with a disability? <Let them respond>

We all have needs and preferences which we would like for others to respect. Regardless of their abilities, it is important that we avoid assumptions and instead take time to get to know individuals in order to share God's love more fully with them.

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Let us now proclaim responsively

God created all living things good: a litany for Disability Awareness Sunday¹

By Deaconess Lynn Swedberg

God created all living things. God created humans in God's image, and God said that God's creation was good!

So we, too, believe that people of all ages, shapes, and abilities are created in the image of God.

God called leaders like Jacob who limped from a hip injury and Moses who had a speech disability to lead God's people!

So we, too, welcome pastors and leaders with disabilities alongside pastors and leaders without disabilities.

¹ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1a_Eo4FsqPUTwicdfLrS09oGEAGxwLF2J/view

The Psalms celebrate that we are all fearfully and wonderfully made, and that God has loved us since before our birth!

So we, too, celebrate each child, with and without disabilities, as a unique and wonderfully made gift from God.

Jesus welcomed children and said that His followers were to come to God like children!

So we, too, are to be open and childlike in our praise of God and love of neighbor.

Jesus reached out to people with mental and physical disabilities and helped them be welcomed members of their communities!

So we, too, welcome all people into our congregations, worship, and fellowship.

Paul taught that the Church needs people of all gifts and abilities in order to be the whole Body of Christ!

So we, too, look for the gifts that each of us brings to the church and our communities, and we help each person find ways to serve God.

Paul preached and spread the gospel throughout much of the known world despite his poor vision and thorn in the flesh that kept him humble!

So we, too, are witnesses for God, offering our whole selves without excuses.

Only God our Creator, Savior, and Spirit is perfect!

We are all human, called, not to be perfect, but only to do our best as loving followers of Jesus who help build God's reign on earth and bring hope and justice for all. AMEN

<Hymn “Love the Lord Your God”

TFWS #2168>

Message: Tested



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/always-give-thanks/week-2-twenty-second-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a/week-2-twenty-second-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-always-give-thanks-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Great God of love and wisdom,

as we take time now to further consider today's scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That we may [pay closer attention to what You are telling us] and share Your grace more fully. Amen.

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We pick up in the series, “Always Give Thanks” this week with “Tested”:

“People who have been in the church a long time may hear the same words and assume they know what they mean, when in fact, we could all use a refresher on what Paul is and is not doing in ~~this~~—[today's] passage.”²

² Theme summary taken from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/always-give-thanks/>.

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picture from

<https://dmv.ny.gov/driver-license>

For a new driver to get a driver's license in New York State, a person at least sixteen years old has to take a multiple choice test to get a permit, take a five hour course, train fifty hours or more (at least fifteen of those at night) with a licensed driver, and finally pass a road test.

Once we get our shiny new driver's license, are we all perfect drivers? Can we trust other drivers to follow the laws perfectly too? Are we done learning all there is to learn about being safe drivers?

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If we assume that everyone – including ourselves – is a perfect driver, we are very likely to find out quickly how wrong we are. Every time I get into a car, I pray that everyone on the road gets home safely because of [the crazy things I see drivers do] and [the unexpected hazards we come across that are not due to any driver].

Driving safely requires constantly paying attention *all around you* and adjusting as needed for ever-changing conditions, despite distractions that come up. It includes holding your temper in check when you

get frustrated by a situation as well as slowing down or speeding up to avoid collisions. It means paying attention to where other drivers are going and relying on common expectations for right-of-way to enable smooth traffic flow. And as with anything, the more you practice it, the better you get.

The Israelites under Moses were learning how to live as the people of God. They had had to leave Egypt, see that God took care of their needs in the wilderness, commit to the covenant on Mount Sinai, and then practice their faith for forty years under Moses's direction. Now, they were about to enter the promised land – and like a person taking a road test, they were having to do it without Moses's coaching.

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picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/jvh-moses/>;
courtesy of Jan van 't Hoff/
Gospelimages.com

After they settled in the new land, they venerated Moses as a beloved mentor, more capable than anyone else they encountered. As Einstein is to physics, so Moses is for the Jewish faith – he completely changed their understanding of it and became the unmatched ideal for any human following.

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But much as our driving knowledge grows as we gain more experience after we get our license (and much as the field of physics continued to advance after

Einstein was gone), the Israelites continued to grow in faith – albeit sporadically and with some setbacks. Their kingdom rose and fell, and in exile they learned that God was with them even without the temple. The psalmist calls to God with a greater understanding of the Lord's eternal presence and power than the people had in the time of Moses.

By Jesus's day, various Jewish sects had formed, each jockeying for power and prestige among the faithful. After being insulted through parables by Jesus, the temple leaders sent first their disciples and the Herodians to ask Jesus about taxes and then the Sadducees to ask Jesus about the resurrection. In doing so, the chief priests and elders figured they could not lose: for the Herodians, for the Sadducees, or for Jesus to be taken down was a win for them.

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picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/lumo-authority/>;
courtesy of Lumo Project Films – www.lumoproject.com.

The Pharisees were scholars and philosophers, among the most brilliant minds of the day. On seeing Jesus deal with all of the others, they tried to debate with Him – only to find that the wisdom of the Almighty far surpasses the brightest human minds.

I like that Jesus did not dismiss any of the questions – He answered them all – but He did call

out their motives for asking them. Jesus caused people to pay attention and get back on track with their faith. He made them think about how their faith practices affected the rest of the people and He realigned their expectations with the love of God.

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We are called to think about our faith practices, how we affect other people, and to align with the love of God, even when (especially when) we have trials testing us: that is how we grow in faith. Where we fail gives us information on how we can improve.

Paul certainly responded to that call on our faith – all the time, from what his letters describe. When he in Philippi, he cast out a spirit of divination from a slave, which led to Silas and him being beaten and jailed without a trial. Their faithfulness in jail caused the jailer and his family to convert; the next morning, the magistrates formally apologized to them because Paul was a Roman citizen who legally should not have been treated that way.

Paul had already been chased out of numerous towns by the Jews, and he still went to the synagogues first. After being mistreated in Philippi, Paul and Silas traveled to Thessalonica and spent three weeks teaching about Jesus in the synagogue there – until the Jewish leadership caused a ruckus, which led to Paul and Silas being sent to safety that night by the new community of believers in Thessalonica.

Yet while they were there, Paul faithfully told the good news about Jesus as the Messiah, including sharing his own faith story. He stayed aligned with God's love and mindful of how he affected other people. By letting them get to know him, Paul formed deep bonds of love and trust with them; from that, they believed the gospel and grew in faith.



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/always-give-thanks/week-2-twenty-second-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a/week-2-twenty-second-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-always-give-thanks-graphics>

We all have trials and challenges to deal with; God walks with us through them, sustains us, and calls us to persevere, trusting in Jesus, to share His Word and love through the power of the Holy Spirit wherever and whenever we are.

So this week, I call on you to:

- ✝ Trust in God.
- ✝ Actively work on putting aside assumptions you make about others. We do not know what others are struggling with; someone else's bad attitude probably has nothing to do with you directly and could use some help from you to reset.
- ✝ Seek what is best – the love of Jesus and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. If you are not able to help someone reset to a positive direction, do not remain where you will be abused. Paul went to

other cities when he was rejected, but stayed in touch with the faithful who remained behind through his letters. Remember, there is more than one way to share God's love in any situation.

- ✝ Persevere – this is where developing healthy habits of faith renewal will really help you. Pray, read scripture, meditate on the Lord – whatever helps you connect with God – and then go into the world sharing the insights and joy you gain from that. Do not let one person's rejection prevent you from sharing with others. Keep working at it!

The first time I took my practical driver's test, I failed it. From that, I learned what I needed to work on to be a better driver, and later passed it. The first time we talk with someone about our faith, it can be rough. But we can learn from that, dig into our faith more with meatier questions, and get better at sharing our faith with others.

- ✝ And finally, live God's kingdom on this earth as best you can. Be as a saint in this way: Share your true self with others in the love of God, that deep bonds may be formed and the good news may be told effectively through you by how you live and speak.

May we all, like the Israelites, like those Jesus taught, and like Paul, work through the testing trials of life with trust in God, that the power of the Holy Spirit may help us to grow stronger and more

faithful as the body of Christ.