



Gotcha Questions!

22ND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
THE REV. KATHLEEN D. R. HARKNESS

November 9, 2025

**Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
of Springfield Township,
in Bucks County, PA**

2170 Route 212
Coopersburg, PA 18036
610-346-7282

Luke 20:27-38

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

Jesus said to them, "Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage, 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. Indeed, they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection. 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. Now he is God not of the dead but of the living, for to him all of them are alive."

How many of you are familiar with "gotcha" questions? People are often asked gotcha questions when interviewing for a job. Here's a story about a woman who was interviewing for a job. Sarah had years of experience and was confident in her technical skills. The interview panel included the R&D director, a senior scientist, and a human resources representative. The questions were mostly standard until the R&D director, known for his intense management style, leaned in and asked her. "I see you worked at BioCorp for five years. They had a major product recall three years ago due to quality control issues. Were you involved in the department responsible, and what exactly did you do wrong?"

This was a classic "gotcha" question, designed to put Sarah on the defensive. He wanted to see how she would handle pressure by asking her a loaded question that implied she was personally at fault without any factual basis.

This is how Sarah handled it: 1) she stayed calm and composed, took a breath, paused briefly, and maintained eye contact. She didn't react emotionally or impulsively. She challenged the underlying assumption and challenged the premise by seeking clarity. "I was a senior lab technician in a different division, and my role was unrelated to the specific product line that faced the recall," she explained calmly. 2) She redirected her answer to her relevant experience and values. She then used the question as an opportunity to highlight her own proactive approach to quality control, aligning her response

with the company's needs. 3) And then she shifted the focus back to the job by bringing the conversation back to the role she was interviewing for.

The R&D director nodded, seeming satisfied with her professional and informative response. She diffused the tension while demonstrating her expertise. By challenging the "gotcha" and pivoting to her strengths, Sarah successfully navigated a tricky situation and eventually got the job.

Jesus was a master of the "gotcha" question and up until today's text, he had been asked multiple gotcha questions by the Pharisees, chief priests and now the Sadducees. The questions he was asked were designed to test, trick, or trap him into divulging a damaging or embarrassing response. They were manipulative and framed an issue in a way that was difficult to answer without appearing to concede a point.

Jesus and his disciples have been traveling toward Jerusalem. He has been healing the sick, preaching to the people, and teaching the twelve about the kingdom of God. Now in Jerusalem, Jesus is asked several gotcha questions. While in the temple, the chief priests and scribes ask him: *"Tell us, by what authority you are you doing these things? Who is it that gave you this authority?"* Jesus calmly answers their question with a gotcha question of his own. *"Did the baptism of John come from heaven or was it of human authority?"* The priest and scribes now know they are trapped and simply say: *"We don't know."*

Next, Jesus tells the people a parable about wicked tenants. When the chief priests realize the parable is about them and that they are the wicked tenants, they want to lay hands-on Jesus. But they are afraid of the people, so they decide to watch him and spy on him.

They then ask Jesus another gotcha question. *"Is it lawful for us to pay tribute to Caesar or not?"* Perceiving their craftiness, Jesus asks for a denarius. He points to the picture of Caesar and answers: *"Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's."*

And now the Sadducees asked Jesus yet another gotcha question: *"If a woman has had seven husbands and no children, whose wife will she be in the resurrection?"*

It's a ridiculous question, because the Sadducees don't even believe in resurrection. They only believe in the Torah, the first five books of the Bible. So, what are they up to? They are trying to get Jesus to agree with them. Jesus answers their question quite simply. *"For those in the here and now, marriage is important. But those who are worthy of a place in that age will no longer be concerned about marriage."* Notice Jesus uses the word *worthy* of that age. They will be concerned about other things. Then Jesus points out that the resurrection **does exist** in the Torah. Moses spoke of the Lord as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob as though they are still alive. He doesn't say: God was the Lord of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Therefore, they must be alive.

God is not of the dead, but of the living. The children of God will be with him in the age to come. And there is our hope and God's faithful promise to us. Then some of the scribes proclaim, *"Teacher, you have spoken well."*

So, what does all of this have to do with us? We often wonder about death. What will happen to us? Will we see our loved ones again? It is comforting to think so.

I have done hundreds of funerals, and I take a lot of time to before the funeral to get to know not only the person who has died, but also the deceased's loved ones. And in this process, I am often asked questions that are very hard to answer. They almost sound like gotcha questions. Except I know when a person dies, those left behind grieve their loss. They want to know what has happened to their loved one. What will happen when I die? Will I be reunited with my husband, my child who died, or even my beloved animals when I die? Older members outlive their spouses and remarry and even remarry again—well maybe not seven times, but enough to make them wonder and ponder about the same question the Sadducees ask Jesus.

We make assumptions about the resurrection based on our own experience in this world. We think death is simply an extension of life as we know it. But it isn't. Resurrection implies a different set of priorities and concerns. Faith in the resurrection requires that we love one another. Sometimes we are good at it. Other times we aren't. But God, who is rich in mercy has saved us by his grace.

The apostle Paul announces triumphantly that "love never ends" in his letter to the Corinthians. Jesus does not answer all our questions, though one of our fondest illusions is that he should. What Jesus does do is to point us to a God whose faithfulness to those whom God has called is immeasurable and inexhaustible. In your baptism, God has taken hold of you and will never let you go. In knowing, believing, and trusting in God's faithfulness we find enough to endure all that life and death will ask of us.

So, in the meantime, have no fear little flock. While we are in this age, we are to live as God's beloved children in the here and now. We are to do all we can for the good of others. We are to bring glimpses of the kingdom while we are living by helping the needy, improving the human situation in our churches, communities, country, and world. We are to build each other up and not tear each other down.

Death is the end of many things, but it isn't the end of everything. God doesn't release us when we die. God puts us in his heart. God's love for us is eternal. God's mercy is eternal.

The most comforting thing I find people resonate with is that when we die, we rest with God. We will dwell in God's peace, love, and joy. God is near to those who are brokenhearted. God walks with us through our grief and sorrow. God is present in our pain. And death is not the end of our story. We have the hope of the resurrection and eternal life with God.

In Jesus' name, amen.