

Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost
C Proper 27 2025
Saint Barnabas's Church, Falmouth MA
The Rev. David Rider
November 9, 2025

Luke 20:27-38

I wrestle with life's ambiguities as much as the next person, but I am highly confident about one certainty

No one worshiping among us leapt out of bed this morning hoping to wade through the intricacies of ancient levirate marriage in which one woman is passed among seven brothers in futile hope of producing offspring

Further, I'll bet no one here expected to think much about the Sadducees and why they rejected the idea of post-mortem existence

Yes, Scripture continues to throw occasional curve balls that cause us to say "I didn't see that coming"

So the preacher gets to say something profound about ancient levirate marriage and post-mortem controversies in 12 minutes—what could go wrong?

Let's briefly give levirate marriage its due, because it's the setup question for today's passage, one found only in Luke's gospel

When in doubt, let's begin with the font of all wisdom, [Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Levirate_marriage), which actually gives solid background on a tradition that is both ancient and still practiced in parts of Africa

Although deeply patriarchal and anathema to anyone with even a whiff of feminist sensibility, let me quote from Wikipedia:

“Levirate marriage can, at its most positive, serve as protection for the widow and her children, ensuring that they have a male provider and protector. [It] can be a positive in a society where women must rely on men to provide for them, especially in societies where women are...regarded as possessions of their husbands, and to ensure the survival of the clan.”

Some ancient evidence suggests that the widow had power of consent or reject, and the practice faded away from Jewish law, but it still remains in contemporary practice—see Wikipedia for details

Secondly and finally for today on this custom, levirate marriage serves as a trick setup question by which the Sadducees seek to entice Jesus into an intellectual food fight

By the way, the Sadducees are mentioned rarely in comparison to the Pharisees, but both camps usually become sparring partners with Jesus, allowing the Jesus team to make an important theological point

Jesus never bites the bait but, instead, paradoxically turns the tables to reframe the issue

Here's the punchline for our contemplation:

“Now he is God not of the dead but of the living, for to him all of them are alive.”

Just before this line, Jesus reminds us that we are children of God and children of the resurrection

The passage provides a spiritual throwback to Easter and a reminder that as children of the resurrection, God has big things in mind for us

God is not of the dead but of the living, and we are children of the resurrection—these are ginormous, transformative ideas that we water down at our own risk

Imagine what it might mean for our common life if we fully metabolized this teaching

Both the big Easter message and today's edgy reminder tells us that resurrection energy fuels this side of the grave at least as much as it does on the other

We certainly should contemplate and reimagine what we mean by heaven and hell—I once lead a 40-week discussion without exhausting the topic—but today's lesson beckons us to make today count in what we do and say to this world

To mix my metaphors, in this life, are we leaping tall buildings or running out the clock until St Peter calls?

To drop another metaphor, are we swinging for the fences as we reimagine ministry at St Barnabas, or will the same old same old suffice?

In last week's Sunday Forum organizational meeting, we shared wonderful topical idea for potential discussion

Reports from community groups like the Falmouth Service Center, updates on our internal ministries, maybe an article on some vexing intersection between church and society—e.g., white Christian nationalism

Amid the scrum of ideas, we discussed ways in which St Barnabas celebrates spirituality and the arts

I asked an interim's question about whether we see ourselves as an artistic community—not at all sure of any response

Energy went up in the room, suggesting a positive vibe—music, visual artists and writers

So here's my challenge to the artists among us, in keeping with today's scripture

I now know at least four serious writers, and I suspect we have more

What if we hosted a community writers' workshop on the topic of children of the resurrection 2026?

Not some sappy or nostalgic childhood rendering of angel wings, but I would love to read edgy short stories or poems regarding children of the resurrection who tackle society's most challenging issues or who bring beauty back into our stressed-out lives in fresh ways

Is God calling us to be innovative thought leaders on the Upper Cape, or do we lean toward polite conversation and an occasional debate about purchasing cheaper light bulbs for the church?

If God is not of the dead but of the living, what is our daily witness to this faith claim?

What part of your personal life story gives testimony to this claim or causes it to fall short?

How might our parish's evolving mission focus illustrate that we are living by this high-octane spiritual fuel?

How do we balance action and contemplation to energize our personal and parish ministries?

How do our stewardship efforts mirror the wild generosity of God's Spirit pulsing through our veins?

What story are we telling Falmouth and surrounding communities regarding this big witness—remember my bad joke a few weeks back about mating an Episcopalian with a Seventh Day Adventist?

I'm loving the energy that I feel in our worship, our social hours, our meetings and new learning circles

As we embrace the horizon of the holiday season and a new year of spirited ministry, think of yourself as a child of the resurrection who is blessed by the God of the living

I suggest you avoid any temptation to haughtiness or pride

Rather, contemplate the many ways that God's continuing mercy and grace overcome your foibles and set you free for an abundant life of joy and service

In the spirit of that great children's hymn, they will know that we are Christians by our love, by our love, yes, they will know that we are Christians by our love