

Sunday Sermon November 9, 2025

This is a story entitled: “The Star Gazer” by John Shea:

Since his daughter was only three and too young to buy him a Father’s Day gift, he purchased one for himself.

The telescope was magnificent. It was a “Discovery Deluxe.” It had three lenses building up to two hundred and twenty-seven magnification. It had counterbalanced equatorial mounting and included a diagonal prism, sun projector screen, and an SLR reflex finder scope. The salesman threw in an accessory tray. Mounted on its tripod next to the window, it was aimed like a rifle at the stars.

Every night after dinner the owner pasted his eye to the viewfinder and scanned the heavens for movement, excited over the patterns of light a million miles over his head.

At his feet his daughter played...

I like that little story, even though it’s kind of sad. A father so focused on the skies above that he misses the miracle playing at his feet... A man so concerned about the heavenly realm that he doesn’t see that heaven has reached down and touched the earth...

I thought of that little story as I struggled with our Gospel passage for tonight/today. Some Sadducees look to try to trap Jesus with an outrageous story about seven brothers who married the same woman who died childless. (As an aside, I’ve always wondered what brothers 4, 5, 6 and 7 thought – maybe that saw what was coming?)

Anyway, an important aspect of this story is that those religious authorities are assuming that this woman is only property. The property of a man. And that this is the limit of her destiny in the world to come also. “Who’s wife will she be?” As though her only purpose is to belong to a man, in this life and the next.

So focused on puzzling out who she would belong to, the Sadducees show no concern for her as a person. No compassion for what it's like to suffer the loss of one spouse, much less seven. I believe Jesus would have wanted the religious authorities to be more concerned with her suffering in this world than her status in the next.

Jesus doesn't fall into their trap. Rather, he turns it around and refers to her by her most important relationship - her relationship to God. Vs. 36 – she was a “child of God.” A child of God in this life and a child of God in the next.

So focused on gazing up at the stars and pondering the things of heaven, the religious authorities were missing how people were being talked about and treated in this world. People being passed around like property and treated as second class.

Jesus says: “God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.” Instead of pasting your eye to the viewfinder to try to glimpse the afterlife, look around, right at your feet, and see who's been cast aside and put down. Seek to heal, to restore, set free and lift up. See who needs to be told, and shown, that they are beloved: a beloved child of God. Tell them. Show them.

Oliver Wendell Holmes is credited with saying: “some people are so heavenly minded that they are no earthly good.” Instead of arguing about how many angels can dance on the head of a pin or whose wife will she be in the next life, it would have been better if those religious folks were questioning a system that said that poor, grieving woman was considered a kind of non-person if she didn't have a man.

“God is God not of the dead, but of the living.” The life and ministry of Jesus was about inspiring us to fix our gaze on this life, on this world. He's determined our status in the next by giving us a share of his resurrection.

In reflecting on today's Gospel, Nancy Lynne Westfield says: "The mystery of the resurrection revealed by Jesus is that heaven is a place where those who have been dehumanized will be restored; those who have been oppressed will be set free; and those who have been treated as inferior will be raised up and called beloved. Women will no longer be the property of men, treated as chattel – passed from man to man at will and whim. Women will be children of God, able to give love and receive love..."

I would suggest, today, that instead of gazing through a viewfinder to try to see that vision of God's kingdom in the life to come, that we look around, and see the gaps now. See where people are being talked about and treated as anything less than beloved children of God and work to heal, to restore, set free and lift up, so that God's kingdom might come on earth as it is in heaven.

Amen