

SERMON, ST LEONARDS
09th NOVEMBER, 2025
22nd Sunday after Pentecost

Haggai 1.15b – 2.9
Psalms 145: 1-5; 17-21
2 Thess. 2:1-5; 13-17
Luke 20:27-40

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be always acceptable in your sight O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer...

Tomorrow, I'm doing a funeral in Perth. The deceased person is a member of our Cathedral community, and it had been my privilege to sit with him over the last year or so, spend time with him, pray with him and take him the sacrament. This is all a part of my life in Perth and sometimes, often, it intersects with my life here in Denmark. This afternoon, we shall go back to Perth and I will resume duties as normal in the Cathedral. But if I were to be asked where I consider to be home, my heart yearns to be here in Denmark. I can say this for certain because when people in Perth ask me if I have a holiday home in Denmark, I generally say no. It is not a holiday home. It is our Denmark home. I do not think this unusual either. I can think of any number of people for whom Denmark began for them as a holiday place, a few weeks in summer with the kids, maybe. Then perhaps a few weeks more, and a few weeks more at other times of the year. And then they buy the holiday home, which slowly becomes their primary residence until now, this is home. For many of us, then, living in two places is not an unfamiliar experience.

This is rather like what Jesus is talking about when he responds to a question in our gospel reading today. Jesus is teaching in the Temple, in the heart of the Jewish community, of its faith and of its politics. And up crop the Sadducees to ask Jesus a curly question. This is one of a series of curly questions that he is asked by "the chief priests, scribes and elders". Many of these, no doubt would have been Sadducees and while this is

the only time that Luke mentions them, its worth knowing a little about the Sadducees. The late first century Jewish historian Josephus identified three main parties within the Jewish communities of the early first century: the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the Zealots. Bearing in mind that he himself was a Pharisee, and so what he says about the Sadducees is not exactly objective, he tells us a few things that are immediately credible. The first is that they emerged from that part of the intellectual elite which had absorbed and was sympathetic with Greek culture. The second is that they had a particular view of the Law which stressed the Torah only and rejected the oral tradition with which it had come to be surrounded. As a result, they had a very strict view of life after death, rejecting the concept of resurrection, which was favoured by the Pharisees. Another thing that Josephus says of them is that they were sceptical of the reality of angels. We see in them a group of highly educated men, members of the social and political elite, removed from the cares of ordinary folk, and so not especially popular or beloved. Indeed, so embedded were they in the ruling elite of Judaea, that they did not survive as a coherent group after the destruction of the Temple in 71 whereas the Pharisees did, thriving and growing into the rabbinic movement.

The Sadducees, then, were sceptics, who privileged the first five books of the Bible – the Torah – over all other forms of religious experience and expression. The curly question that they asked Jesus was based upon their own rejection of the idea of the resurrection of the dead. The question itself was nasty and mocking. It's rather like those militant atheists who call God "the invisible sky fairy" and ask why he lets horrible things happen in Gaza. They don't ask because they want an answer. It's a "gotcha" question. It's asked to humiliate, to belittle, to scorn.

Jesus' answer is characteristically lateral. He denies the premise of the question. In effect, he is saying that they understand nothing about the resurrection because they have reduced it in their own minds to a snarky debating point. In painting a picture of the resurrection age as a glorious new world with God, he points out that all of the

conventional categories and practices of this world will be irrelevant. Here Jesus quite clearly and deliberately distinguishes this world and the next. In the resurrection, those who rise are glorified, becoming children of God, more angel than human. He tells the Sadducees that they are asking the wrong question because they do not understand what Moses taught them. In the burning bush, God was revealed to Moses as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who in turn are the patriarchs of Israel, the ancestors of the twelve tribes. And Jesus then goes on to say that although these people may have departed this life, they are not dead but eternally alive to God.

If this is so for Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, it is also true for us. God sees us and holds us both as we are and as we shall be. The great promise of our faith is life in eternity with God. It is easy to make the mistake that this means unending life with God, a life of permanent enduring joy, but this is to neither read scripture well nor listen to Jesus closely. It was Irenaeus, the first great post-apostolic Christian theologian who pointed out, way back in the second century, the reason that the Incarnation is so much the heart of our faith: "the Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, ... through His transcendent love, became what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself."

(Against Heresies, Bk 5. Prologue)

It is Jesus himself through his resurrection who introduces a new and different world in which we are made to share in the divine nature. This age is different. We live in time; have customs and practices that help us live together in community; experience the joys and pains of embodiment. But we are also beginning to live in eternity, outside time and duration and ageing, and inside God. Jesus here gives us the hope, not of living forever, but of eternal life. It is into this transformation that we are led from the moment that God takes hold of our lives.

That is when we begin that life to which I referred when I began – the living in two worlds, in the now and the not yet. That is the truth which Jesus expresses and which

Irenaeus explains. The resurrection is not an end in itself, but the end of a process that begins when we say yes to God. From that moment, we enter the Kingdom of God, the realm of heaven that neither obeys earthly rules nor is subject to its terms and conditions. And we begin our own slow transformation, growing into Christ, praying with him and through him, doing as he did, striving to bring peace, healing, love and joy into the lives of those around us – not for some reward (Jesus never really promises us that), but because that is the life that God calls us into. And the more that we grow into it, the more we live in two places: in this age, and in the Kingdom of God. I wonder if you have ever thought where we get the word “parish” from. It derives from a Greek word that we find in the New Testament: *parioikos*. That was the word that the Greeks used to describe resident aliens, non-citizens living in their communities. It asserts that while we are here in this world, we are never wholly part of it, but our true citizenship lies elsewhere. There is a dissonance there. It is real and we feel it. We are a pilgrim people, longing to be completely with God, but for the moment must make do with knowing in part, seeing in part, speaking and teaching and learning in part.

This afternoon, I will get into my car and drive for five hours to our Perth home to return to our Perth life. But the Kingdom of God is not so distant. It is a prayer away, a wish away, a heartbeat away. We are already half there and live with the tension of being in the now and the not quite yet. That is the Christian life – to be unsettled, neither wholly in this world, nor in the next. This in-between life is what we live every day, and are called to live every day for the very simple reason that that is where we are, in this world of space and time. Although we belong in eternity, and our souls still yearn for God, the work of the Kingdom is here for us to do. So let us do it in love, giving ourselves and of ourselves, quietly keeping in our back pocket the sure and certain hope of the resurrection.

The Lord be with you...