

**Sermon: 2019/11/10 (22nd Sunday after Pentecost, Year C) -
Haggai 1:15b-2:9 & Luke 20:27-38_BTR**

[Invite children to the front. Have three balloons, a permanent-ink pen and a pin ready.]

Through a holy man called Abraham, in a country called "Canaan," God, the creator of the universe, decided to make *in particular* a nation of special people to serve Him and be a force for good in the world.

But these special people neglected their relationship with Him, and over time - as history passed - they tried to make themselves feel better by giving *themselves* kings, like Saul... [Blow up balloon, write "K" on it.]

A big city called, Jerusalem... [Blow up balloon, write "J" on it.]

And a Temple too. [Blow up balloon, write "T" on it]

But did they really need these things?

They gave themselves them because other people had them.

Well, the Babylonians invaded Canaan and captured Jerusalem [burst the balloon], blinded and killed the king [burst the balloon], and burned down the Temple [burst the balloon].

And all this made the special people feel very *un*-special indeed.

But God sent the prophet Haggai to tell them a secret:

You are my 'treasure', He says.

What makes you special isn't that other stuff!

It's having my love and favour.

Let's pray:

Lord God, we pray that, by your Holy Spirit, you would help us see that what makes us special is our faith in you. Help us to care less about the things that other people have, and concentrate on our relationship with your Son Jesus. In His name we pray, amen.

[Dismiss children.]

Have you noticed how the focus of Fall seems to be *death*?

Have you noticed that?

Think about it:

The season starts, sort of, with the *real* horror which was 9/11 and its ongoing

national commemoration:

3,000 New Yorkers immolated by Islamic fanatics.

Then, of course, there are the pretend "horrors" of Halloween, with kids dressed as skeletons and zombies and ghosts:

We had a number of neighbors near us in Westwood who stuck out plastic gravestones on their front-lawns.

And one even had a scarecrow that they tied to a tree with a large, bloody kitchen-knife protruding from his "abdomen" as if stabbed and murdered.

There is also Armistice Day on November 11th, reminding us of the *millions* killed in the First World War and *countless* battles since.

And, finally, in addition, all around we see leaves turning brown and falling from the trees; rotting on the ground.

So it is *fantastic* that, against this morbid, gloomy, *depressing* background, Jesus offers us this morning some *fascinating*, further detail about His teaching on the 'resurrection' of the righteous:

This is the idea - *unique* to the Church - that '[t]hose' who have an active, confessing faith in Jesus, 'even though they die, will live [again]': [Jn. 11:25].

This was the very core of His "Good News:" the hope - the goal - *the prize* He was about to win by dying on the cross a few days later.

He *had* mentioned resurrection repeatedly throughout His three year ministry, touring around the Galilee in the north of the "Holy Land."

But today - an episode which takes place in the south - the provocation - the prompting - to refer to it again comes, we see, from the Sadducees.

That's the priests of Israel who ran the temple in Jerusalem.

Presumably, they'd "caught wind" of Christ's message before (actually) meeting Him through the excited rumours that were circulating in the city.

And, in case we've forgotten, Luke - our author - reminds us that they did not believe in such a thing; that they were unconvinced by the gossip they'd heard.

Like many non-Christians today, the Sadducees thought the idea ludicrous; that it was nonsense.

Why did they reject the resurrection?

Because they had an accurate understanding of biology; of the body...

Most of us - in America and in Britain - encounter death principally in bright white hospital rooms.

We encounter death at an open casket, our loved ones their hair brushed, rouge on the cheeks and so on, looking as if they really could just open their eyes and ask for a hand to clamber out.

But in the ancient world - as in the Global South today - death was *raw...*, brutal and smelly.

EMTs didn't show up with crisp body-bags to *whisk* the corpse away to a morgue and shut it out-of-sight in a stainless steel box.

A sanitised place, closed to the public, where they can drain away body-fluids with convenience and ease.

No, in the ancient world your loved ones died in the room you shared with them to sleep, and in the streets and the gutter, and no one came to take them.

And those fluids?

They leaked out on the floor and *you* mopped them up.

Death was, in other words, grotesque and ghastly.

And quite clearly - and this key, now - the logical conclusion of what we are:

Flesh, skin, bone...these things are fragile and finite.

They wither and break.

The idea that Jesus could or would reanimate and sustain our bodies, and do so *indefinitely*, wasn't an attractive picture to the Sadducees.

Which is why they trash it, describing this laughable situation of a resurrected woman suddenly finding herself in the *very* awkward situation of having to choose between the seven husbands she had had in her first life.

But the Savior has no time for such distracting, philosophical, *comedic* hypotheticals.

Of course He understands biology too.

The laws of nature.

Which is why, notice, He explains that the human body as we know and experience it *won't* be what's resurrected:

Rather, the chosen, elected people of God will return 'like angels'

(That's a quote.)

Not as angels themselves.

God has those already.

Loads of them.

Too many, perhaps:

Some - like Satan - weren't all that great.

No, rather: *like* angels.

So, comparable to; resembling them in some way.

Which raises the question: "*What*, exactly, does it mean to be *like* angels?"

Well, the only place we have any reliable *evidence* as to their nature is the Bible.

Put aside what you *think* you know from movies and most art.

Angels in Scripture are much more mysterious, vague, intriguing creatures.

We usually find them described only in those notoriously hard-to-interpret places like the book of *Job*, *Ezekiel* and *Revelation*.

And its hard to generalise:

Their appearance varies...but it is *always* beautiful; *spectacular*!

The men and women who meet them are never, "meh."
Or blasé.
They're *always* awestruck; (and sometimes terrified).

But the *one* thing that the angels do have in common - and no, that's not even wings - and this is partly, therefore, what Jesus must have had in mind when He said we'd be 'like' them, is that they are *always* joy-filled:
They're *always* full of praise and thanksgiving;
"over-flowing" 'continually' with song and mirth.
And doesn't that sound amazing?
Don't you wish that that's all you had to express when you open your mouth:
"song and mirth"?
What a wonderful thing to look forward to, then.

Let's pray:

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