My brothers and sisters in Christ, let us pray. Our Lord God of our grateful hearts, minds, Spirits, and souls, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts always be acceptable in your sight, our strength and our redeemer, Amen.

Those who say there is no resurrection have a question for Jesus about resurrection. We can sense a trap meant to pit Jesus against Moses. The radical teacher against the father of Judaism and how it’s practiced. Surely no faithful Jew would speak against Moses, Abraham, or Elijah, the very mouthpieces of God. It was a fair question for a group of religious teachers and temple officials who believed only in the Pentateuch, the first 5 books of the Torah, and did not accept as canonical anything else. This included a lot of new developments in Judaism, including the concept of resurrection, which is only first explored in some depth during the time of the writing of the book of Daniel, written 800 years after the books of Moses first appeared on the scene. The Saducees enjoyed their tradition, their status, and the power it imbued to them, particularly under Roman occupation and rule.

So the question of the Sadducees seems strange: If they do not believe in the circumstances into which they are inquiring, what, in fact, are they asking? This much is clear: they are unsure about endings. Jesus’ questioners start from the same place he does. Both the teacher and his skeptical hearers revere their tradition—they are all faithful Jews. They both laud the writings of Moses as sacred text, but they do not know where the journey ends. So they ask—as jaded, but honest, and skeptical pupils. How does this line of thinking things alive again align with the tradition they both so love and trust?

Jesus answers by saying that he says what Moses has said—he is hardly being unfaithful to text. But in doing so he exposes holes in the culture, the places where religious thinking is still in process. People back then spent their entire lives falling into cultural expectations, such as marrying (or being married off) and rules about birth order, inheritance, etcetera. These are the walls of their lives, the place in which they live—their religion. Their prescribed social roles become their liturgy. Such expectations are so immense that the Sadducees have shaped their spiritual thinking in this direction.

But to fulfill cultural expectation is to take up residence in that particular age. Moses’ instructions on the social aspects of life have collided with questions of the afterlife, but Jesus has an answer: stop trying to combine the two. Don’t force this temporary life into the mold of permanence for all time. God is not of the dead but is God of the living. Marriage belongs in **this** present place in *this* world, for sure. But a union far greater resides in union with God. Why think of marriage and progeny as our life’s mission? This is dead thinking. Why not instead think about joining with God, the one who makes all living possible? What does THAT kind of increase in life look like?

I’m not saying that marriage isn’t important. Our partnerships matter. It is the difference between death and life. Marriage helps us understand union with another, and it prepares a way for death through the chapters of our life, whether there is one such chapter or, as in the story the Sadducees tell, seven. But let’s not get distracted: our life’s work is going to the moon. It’s not about seeing fingers pointing at the moon, all these stories. The destination is the moon; union with God.

The resurrection reminds the world of the partnership God made with humanity, a partnership aimed toward life. To try to force the form of a limited earthly life into the expanse that is life with God only shows the shortcomings of this age and our own egos taking over again. To think of true life is to think outside of this life. It’s bigger than that. It is to leave time to its own devices, knowing that life together with God ultimately takes on a different hue, a way of being that exceeds the limits of how we can currently be.

To refer to “this age” as such is not to insult. We live in “this age”. It is a reminder that the God who created this age and lived in it as a teacher is pushing for his hearers to understand it only as a moment, not the be-all-end-all. It’s important to help others understand that all things pass away when it comes to the Kingdom of God and Kingdom living. We need not worry about all the stuff and inheritances we’ve accumulated, or the social status and power of our beings once we’re dead. It all leaves us. When things pass away, our lives transform into something entirely different after we die. All are equal before God, and money won’t get you into heaven.

The resurrection presents a lesson in time. Moses understands this, that life can be found again on the other side of death. A bush of fire tells Moses that things that should consume life like fire are in fact under the will and control of God. In other words, God speaks to Moses while a bush does not burn—two impossible things that nevertheless enter into the realm of the possible. Perhaps Moses learns that resurrection can look like not being consumed by that which should consume us. Resurrection often looks like the opposite of what should be.

God’s being has been present in resurrection since before Moses. God and resurrection is in Abraham going to a new land under God’s command and fathering a child at an impossible age. God and resurrection is in Isaac being carried to his near death with the hope that life might be on the other side. God and resurrection is in Jacob’s wrestling with God and surviving and thriving in what should have killed him. Resurrection means living on, even though circumstances should not allow it to be so. Resurrection is the miracle of persisting, of the glory of life where it is not expected to survive or thrive.

In the Sadducees’ story, the woman outlives the men whose lives were supposed to enhance her own. The Sadducees inventory the men whom this woman was not able to keep alive. The misfortune of death appears to be the woman’s lot, they say in their inventory of her life.

But Jesus instead inventories Moses. His genealogy points to Moses as the resurrection of the spirit of their people, for God was with him. Resurrection life is where God is, across generations, across circumstances. The Sadducees focus on the men dying. Jesus sees how the generations have lived on, and the woman’s resurrection does not rely on these men one bit.

I’ll leave you with these final thoughts.

We have to be careful about defining resurrection: it’s the belief that God gives new life in our transcended Spirit to those who have died. That’s different from immortality, which is the view that there’s something inherent in humans that never dies. Immortality is a theory about the nature of humans; resurrection is the conviction and belief about the act of God, that God which has acted in relationship to real people throughout history, and through whom we still experience Spiritual events. God is indeed eternal.

Throughout the New Testament, faith in life after death is expressed through resurrection, not immortality. Resurrection is about how everyone is claimed as a child of God, wrested from the surety of death. For to God, all are alive, and for that transformed life that is here and beyond our sight,

Thanks be to God,

Amen.