



*Living Courageously*

*Tenth in the Fall sermon series, "Taking Jesus Seriously"*

*Luke 20:27-38*

*Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost ~ Sunday, November 10th, 2019*

*First Federated Church of Peoria, Illinois*

*The Rev. Dr. Forrest Krummel, Jr.*

*Text: And the fact that the dead are raised Moses himself showed, in the story about the bush, where he speaks of the Lord as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive. (vss. 37, 38)*

I'm going to tell you a story about a man who was either terribly courageous or foolish.

On the East wall in the fellowship hall of a Presbyterian church in Burlington, Iowa there is mounted a brass plaque. Above it is a picture of a Chinese family. It was taken in the late 1890s or very very early part of the 20th century. They are dressed in the traditional garb of the period, their "Sunday best." In the picture you see a husband and wife, standing and surrounded by their five children. The man in the picture is Tien Ying.

When Tien Ying was a boy the Sunday School department of that church in Iowa supported him with their weekly offering. At the beginning of the school year each child was given a little clay bank in which they could put their offering. At the end of the program year the children walked to the chancel area of the church and their little clay bank broken open. The change was counted and as the amount grew with each offering the children and the adults in worship grew more and more excited. The proceeds of that offering sent Tien Ying of a school run by Presbyterian missionaries.

Tien Ying grew to be a strong young man. And, he decided to become a minister, an evangelist in his homeland. He married and had children. Then, in 1904 something happened. China awoke from the slumber of colonialism in what we in the West call "The Boxer Rebellion". I know from first hand experience that this part of their history is not taught in China for it was a period when mob rule tried to eradicate all signs of Western influence, including Christianity.

The Board of Missions urged Tien Ying to abandon in ministry in Beijing but he would not. Consequently, it was only a matter of time before he would be caught up in the violence. Exactly when his family was taken into custody by the Boxers we do not know. But what we do know is that the family was taken to the outskirts of Beijing. A herdsman was on a hill watching his herd and saw the events of that day. He later reported what he saw to the Board of Missions.

Tien Ying was given the chance to renounce their Christian faith. With renunciation their lives would be spared. Tien Ying refused. His fate was sealed. He was given a chance to have a prayer with his wife. She was the first to be beheaded, sparing her the anguish of seeing each of her five children, eldest to youngest, beheaded.

Tien Ying knelt with each of his children for a few moments of comfort and prayer. Each child was then beheaded. And then, it was Tien Ying's turn. He knelt, bowed his head, and joined his family in the next Reality.

So, was Tien Ying terribly courageous or foolish?

The Psalmist said that A fool says in his heart, there is no God. He does corrupt and abominable things.

All of this brings us to today's Gospel lesson. The Sadducees did not believe in resurrection but they did believe in Scripture and supporting documents. In levirate law found in the Book of Deuteronomy a man was required to marry his brother's widow if he left no sons. Taking this long ignored teaching the Sadducees posed to Jesus a trick question. They wished to discredit Jesus' teachings through the art of distraction, not unlike a magician leading an audience one way while they go to another, a bit of theological sleight of hand. Jesus, though, was not distracted. He saw through the trick.

In our text he pointed to the Sadducees own Scripture saying that the dead are indeed raised, that there is a resurrection because Moses himself said so. At the burning bush Moses spoke of the Lord as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. "God is not God of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) are alive. (see today's text above)

In other words, there is a Reality beyond this reality of sight and sound. What is sown perishable is raised imperishable. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. (I Corinthians 15, selected verses.)

A few weeks ago Sue and I saw a one man show entitled, "An Evening with C. S. Lewis". I was reminded of his Chronicles of Narnia, the Harry Potter of an earlier generation. The children in the Chronicles have as many adventures as the children of Harry Potter. In the seventh and final book of the Narnia series there is a terrible train wreck. As the children emerge from the train wreck they are met by the Christ or God figure Aslan, a mighty lion, the King of the Beasts. The closing lines of the book are as follows. "There was a real railway accident," said Aslan softly. "You father and mother and all of you are--as you used to call it in the Shadow-Lands--dead. The term is over: the holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning'

"And as He spoke He no longer looked to them like a lion; but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story, which no one on earth has read: which goes on for ever: in which every chapter is better than the one before."

So, was Tien Ying terribly courageous or terribly foolish? I believe that he knew that God is not the God of the dead, but of the living and in God all are alive. I believe that he knew the truth of the Brief Statement of Faith, "In life and in death we belong to God." To God be the glory. Amen.