

“Knife at the heart.” Luke 20:27-40

There came to him some Sadducees, those who deny that there is a resurrection, and they asked him a question, saying, “Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies, having a wife but no children, the man must take the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. Now there were seven brothers. The first took a wife, and died without children. And the second and the third took her, and likewise all seven left no children and died. Afterward the woman also died. In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had her as wife.” And Jesus said to them, “The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage, for they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection. But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the bush, where he calls the Lord the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him.” Then some of the scribes answered, “Teacher, you have spoken well.” For they no longer dared to ask him any question.”

Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Sadducees... Making fun of the hope of the resurrection. Just as people do today. What they meant was to mock Jesus, to show how foolish His message was. What they did, they put the knife at the very heart of Christian faith. Yes, that is exactly what they did.

Mocking the hope of the resurrection. “How can you believe in the resurrection from the dead? How can you teach it, Jesus?!” Sadducees, the aristocratic and wealthy religious leaders of the Jews, who cherished their Temple worship but didn’t really believe either angels or demons, or spiritual realities or... the resurrection of the dead. So much like the people today. Smart in their own eyes, mocking and trying to make fun of things which seem incomprehensible to their reason.

Sadducees approached Jesus with this ridiculous scenario about the women and seven brothers who would need to marry them one after another if the previous failed to produce an heir. That hypothetical scenario was based on God’s instructions from the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 25, where the intention of that instruction was to care for widows, for one of the most vulnerable groups of people at that time.

So, yes, the Sadducees didn’t really care to hear Jesus’ answer, they just wanted to show their contempt to the very idea of the resurrection from the dead by providing this most ridiculous scenario. What they tried to say was: “This is so stupid, so crazy, how could this possibly be true!”

This is what we do, as fallen and foolish human beings. We use our tiny minds and our vast ignorance as standards evaluating what God the Creator can or can’t do. Makes sense. Doesn’t it? We, little specks, standing tall as judges of the Triune God.

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But we probably shouldn't be pointing fingers at those outside the Church; there are plenty who claim to be Christians who deal with the resurrection as with a hot potato, not knowing what to do with it. What about us?

Don't we sometimes doubt some of what the Holy Spirit has revealed to us in the Bible, some of what Jesus did, some of what He promised? Can it really be true? Are you free of such doubts? But just reflect – how little we really know?

Even about God's creation, about things visible and invisible. How long ago was it that humanity began to utilize electricity? The first light bulb was invented just barely 150 years ago. In a recent interview one of Oxford University professors stated that we still don't know what electricity is.

What about other invisible things? Radio... TV... Internet and mobile communications? How is it possible that this week I spoke with my parents in Latvia and with our children in Australia – I saw and heard them, in real time, and they saw and heard me. All of that... while I was casually driving our car.

If you told people about these invisible phenomena a century or two ago, who would believe you? That can't possibly be true! Ridiculous! Now most of us just use them, even as only a few understand how they work. Now, what about this one?

The smartest minds have come to conclude that of all the Universe that we know... 95-96% [!] are made up of something that we have no clue about at all, of so-called dark matter and dark energy. We have no idea what those 95% are.

And yet, we are quick to use our ignorance and limitedness as standards to what is possible for that Being who created everything that exists. From nothing. And we may perceive questions like the one Sadducees asked as a proof of our cleverness.

What funny, little, foolish creatures we are! Dr John Lennox is a Christian with three doctoral degrees, retired professor in Oxford University, who regularly participates in public debates with those who reject and mock the message of the Bible.

In one of the recent debates, he was asked: "Dr Lennox, and you of all people really believe that Jesus walked on the water? Really?" Do you know what he replied? "What a big deal for Jesus to walk on the water?! Jesus invented water."

We are fools when we want to judge what God can or cannot do from our creaturely perspective. But let's get back to the question about the resurrection. This question is at the very heart of how we as Christians see this life and the life to come.

Paul the apostle wrote: **"If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, and your faith is in vain."** (1 Cor 15:14) This is true, the whole house of Christian faith hinges on the fact of Jesus' resurrection.

If He did rise, He is who He claimed to be and everything He has said and promised is true and will happen. If He didn't rise from the dead, we better go home and find something more useful to do than to sit and listen to ancient fairy tales.

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So, which is it? Why would we believe, why would we be so certain that Jesus arose from the dead that we bet our entire life and even the life to come on this? How could we explain it to others? Let's review what we know from the testimonies of hundreds and thousands of Jesus' contemporaries who witnessed what He did.

It was difficult for them. What they witnessed with their own eyes challenged everything they knew. This guy, Jesus from Nazareth, some of them have grown up with Him, seen him as a toddler and as a teenager. But now, suddenly, He healed everyone - sick, blind, lame, deaf, demon possessed. More, He was able to share this miraculous ability with His closest followers, He enabled them to do it too.

But there was more. He even raised the dead. Before the eyes of hundreds of eyewitnesses, even the state officials from Jerusalem were perplexed – what to do, how to respond? That was shocking. But there was more.

This Jesus, He had power even over the forces of creation. One time, while crossing the sea of Galilee, they got caught in a severe storm. Boats were filling up with water and about to sink. What about Jesus? He was asleep. Exhausted from healing the crowds.

His disciples tried to wake Him: "Jesus, get up, help, we are about to sink, grab a bucket, give a hand!" Have you ever been awoken when you are very tired? How did you feel? Angry? Upset? Irritated? It seems Jesus was too.

He opened His eyes and said just one word: "**Siopa!**" Which means "silence!" And immediately... The storm went still. And great fear overtook everyone in all those boats that accompanied Him: "**Who is this, that even the wind and sea obeys Him?**"

But then Jesus began to tell something that no one wanted to listen to. No one would take it seriously. Why would they? He was repeatedly telling that He, their beloved teacher, the most popular rabbi, that He will be betrayed, captured, tortured and murdered. Then, on the third day He would rise again. Resurrection...

He told this openly. He told this repeatedly. No one believed Him. Do you know why? Because things like that do not happen. All of Jesus' listeners knew it well. As well as people do today - there is not such a thing as the resurrection of the dead.

Then came that fateful week. Jesus was betrayed. He was captured and tortured, and He was murdered and He did die. Crucified. Naked before the eyes of those who despised Him. The spear of a Roman soldier pierced His heart making sure He was dead. He was... And what did the disciples of Jesus do after He was crucified?

"O, let's wait for the third day, Jesus will rise again!" No... They were desperate and frightened, hiding. They thought everything was over. They had wasted years of their life following Jesus, hoping for a better life. Now He was dead.

It was over. All hopes were gone. On the morning of the first day of the week women went to Jesus' tomb. Why? To check whether He has already risen? No! To take care of His dead body. But to great surprise they found the tomb open... and Jesus's body

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gone. "Ha, this is the third day, perhaps Jesus has risen? Praise the Lord!" No! That's not what they thought! Someone has stolen the body, we don't know who has taken Him. And then it happened - the risen Jesus appeared to them.

To His closest disciples, to His family members, to more than 500 brothers at one time. To more than 500 eyewitnesses at once! When Paul the apostle wrote his letter to Christians in Corinth, he mentioned that most of those eyewitnesses were still alive.

When the documents of the New Testament were written, the same that you read today, most of the eyewitnesses of Jesus' resurrection were still alive. Can anyone in a sound mind believe in the resurrection of the dead?!

It sounded unbelievable even to Jesus' closest disciples. Until they saw Him, touched Him, ate with Him. Repeatedly. Whatever unbelievable it may sound, what can you do when you see that risen person?

When risen Jesus invites you: "Come and put your finger in my wounds, come touch my side!" Or when He gives you a fish to eat and converses with you? When God comes as one of us and compels us to rethink everything.

Do you know that all the apostles, but John were murdered? You know why? Because they would not stop proclaiming what they had seen and heard, what their hands had touched, the true man and the true God, the very life itself - the Risen Lord Jesus.

Do you realize what this means for you if the testimonies of all those hundreds and thousands of eyewitnesses are true? Let the apostle Paul explain to us: **"Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his."** (Romans 6:3-5)

That is certainly true. The Sadducees put the knife at the very heart of Christian message. Those who mock the resurrection of the body today do the same. In response Jesus didn't just confess that it is true. God the Father raised Him from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, Risen Jesus then sent the same Spirit to dwell in us and promised that as the Spirit raised Him so He will also raise us.

For new life, everlasting, blessed and joyful life in new resurrected bodies, just like that of Jesus, to live with our Risen Lord in New Heavens and new Earth, and to reign with Him forever. This is certainly true. Can we picture how it will be? No! Can we understand or explain how the Triune God will do that, how will He raise us, how will He restore His entire creation? No, we can't.

But if Jesus' life, death and resurrection teach and assure us of anything, it is this - we can trust this God, who not only became one of us as promised, but also suffered and died for us as promised. We can trust Him, that where Jesus is, there we will be also.

Soon enough. Amen.