

## A sermon by Canon Maggie Guite

Foretastes of heaven 10/11/19

3 before Advent C All Age Eucharist, Linton

Luke 20.27-38

[Give people samples of Cheese on sticks – as in a supermarket – and then discuss whether the samples taste like the block from which they were cut.]

What do you believe about life after death? It's a really difficult topic, isn't it? Are you more like the Sadducees in our Gospel reading who found it beyond the things they thought they understood, so they just didn't believe in it; or are you more like the Pharisees of Jesus' day, who thought that one day we'll all be raised to life again, and perhaps that means a life not too unlike the one we know now? I don't suppose they believed that in quite the crude sort of way that people sometimes express nowadays, when they say things like, 'Now Uncle Bert's passed on, I expect he's up there in the clouds having a pint in the evening and a chuckle, just like he always did'. After all, the Pharisees didn't believe life after death would begin till God raised

everyone to life again at the end of the age, and then we'd all stand up from our graves, and there'd be judgement and other awesome things to contend with - not just carrying on drinking and chuckling! But, even so, the Sadducees liked to parody their belief that there was anything to look forward to beyond the grave, by making out they were talking about human life, much as it had always been – 'business as usual'.

Anyway, that's the background to the Sadducees' strange trick question to Jesus about the poor woman who married 7 husbands in this life, and lost them all, without having any children. Was Jesus a kind of Pharisee? If so, could he provide an answer to the question about whose wife she would be in the Resurrection? Or was he more 'with' the Sadducees, who thought the whole thing was impossible? And basically, Jesus' answer was that *both* the Sadducees and the Pharisees had got it wrong.

At this point in his life, the Gospels tell us, Jesus was looking forward to, and beginning to teach his disciples about, his own resurrection, and that certainly implied life beyond death not only for him, but for us, too. Our whole Christian faith really only exists because Jesus

rose from the dead, and his disciples met him, and everything was changed. As St Paul said in his first letter to the Corinthians, '*Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection*', and then, '*if for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied*'. (1 Cor. 15, 12 and 19).

So, believing in life beyond the grave is pretty basic to the Christian faith. But did Jesus, in the Gospel story, we heard today actually tell us very much about what life beyond death is *like*?

Who thinks he did?

Well, if we look at the story in the Bible – or on the Red Tops – we find that he said two things: first that in the life beyond this one we'll be '*like angels*', and secondly, that this life isn't only in the future – it's *now*. God *wasn't* just the God of a dead Abraham and Isaac and Jacob long ago; he *is* their God now, - which implies that they're in some sense living with him in the present.

Now, these are very important things to grasp, but I think they still leave life beyond this one, Resurrection

life, very hard to imagine. Do you agree? I don't suppose that Uncle Bert, carrying on with his pint and his chuckling in the evenings, however loveable a memory and an image that is, makes us think of the life of the angels! And what Jesus said also leaves us having to hold together the idea of Resurrection – being raised to new life in some decisive act by God – alongside the idea of an eternally present heaven.

I guess the truth is that we don't have to be able to *understand* the life beyond this one which Jesus made possible through his death and resurrection – we just have to take it on trust. But if we want to have some clues to help us go on trusting, then we can get hold of the idea that there are some things in this life which are like little *foretastes* of heaven – not the whole thing (like the whole the block of cheese) – but things which give us a very good idea of the *quality* of resurrection life, or heavenly life – its taste - even though it's so far beyond our imagining.

So, that leaves us with the question, what *sort* of experiences might be little foretastes of heaven – things that give us the hope and strength to go on believing and reaching out for it? What do *you* think?