

Message: "The Orange/Apple Conundrum"

Scripture Lesson: Luke 20:27-38

²⁷Some Sadducees, those who say there is no resurrection, came to him ²⁸and asked him a question, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies, leaving a wife but no children, the man shall marry the widow and raise up children for his brother. ²⁹Now there were seven brothers; the first married, and died childless; ³⁰then the second ³¹and the third married her, and so in the same way all seven died childless. ³²Finally the woman also died. ³³In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had married her." ³⁴Jesus said to them, "Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage; ³⁵but those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. ³⁶Indeed they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection. ³⁷And 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. ³⁸Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive."

Do you know.....why fire engines are red? They are red because they have eight wheels and four people on them, and four plus eight is twelve, there are twelve inches in a foot, and one foot is a ruler, and Queen Elizabeth was a ruler, and Queen Elizabeth was also a ship, and the ship sailed the seas, and in the seas are fish, and the fish have fins, and the Finns fought the Russians, and the Russians are red, and that is why firetrucks are red! Do you follow?

You've probably heard that before (and I think I've shared this in a sermon quite awhile ago....); it's one of the most popular examples of what is called a false equivalence.

A **false equivalence** is a type of [logical fallacy](#) in which a person attempts to draw an equivalence between two things based on the presence of a few shared features when those two things are not alike in the relevant respects. False equivalencies are a type of fallacy because they **exaggerate the similarities or downplay the differences between two or more things in order to draw some kind of comparison**. You know - like comparing apples to oranges?

For instance, consider a group of professionals raising up the issue of the standards of one contextual reality being the same standards of a completely different contextual reality. Or, to be more specific, this group of professionals quizzing an authority on legal parameters regarding marriage in this life as to how they apply after this life. That's what is going on in our scripture passage from Luke, where the Sadducees, a group of religious professionals, are attempting to interrogate Jesus in a question regarding the rule of marriage law in this life and in the life to come. Please don't miss that the group posing the question about the afterlife do not believe in the afterlife; for them there is no resurrection of the body or soul; there is nothing beyond death.

So it is almost certainly a ruse; they seek to entrap Jesus in saying something wrong - they do not seek answers, they seek his downfall. But Jesus understands this, and refutes their question; ³⁴Jesus says to them, "Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage; ³⁵but those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. ³⁶Indeed they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection. God is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive."

It's a very nice way of saying, "You guys have no idea what you are talking about!" You are trying to compare apples to oranges, trying to compare temporality with eternity, trying to compare material with spiritual. It doesn't work.

This is what happens when the objective is no longer truth, but winning at all costs - YOU LOOK FOR THINGS THAT CAN ARGUE YOUR CASE, REGARDLESS OF WHETHER THEY ARE RELEVANT OR NOT. You state opinions and share comparisons and argue points that have little to no bearing on reality except for the extent that you can undermine others with them. The game they play isn't about winning but making sure the other party loses.

If ever we needed a scripture for these days in which we live, this is it! Such games are being played in abundance today, in ways that are as disheartening as they are dangerous. Truth is being treated as expendable, giving way to opinion or hearsay or downright lying. False equivalences are being used to distract, mislead, and manipulate the unaware.

When you hear those who lost an election claim violently that the election was rigged while at the same time producing absolutely no evidence, you know the game's afoot.

When you hear the fossil fuel industry spokespersons and certain political figures call climate change a hoax while ignoring the fact that 97% of all scientists and over 225 officially-recognized scientific associations around the globe agree, and have even signed declarations, that climate change is both real and influenced by human activity - when you hear these things, you know the game's afoot.

When you hear the spokesperson for the Global Methodist Church, Rev. Rob Renfroe, state that the United Methodist Church doesn't accept the Bible as the authoritative Word of God (we do), that we affirm membership in our church for those who claim a God other than the God made known in Jesus (we don't), or that

we have no doctrine (we do), we realize that the game afoot is not to pursue a relationship with a gracious, loving God but to convince people to join a newly-formed denomination on theologically shaky ground at the expense of the United Methodist Church (please note: I've been watching Adam Hamilton's responses to a slew of videos from Rob Renfroe - and Adam agrees with me! Or it's much more that I agree with him.....). There is, indeed, a game afoot within a breakaway denomination.

(Just to be clear, the United Methodist Church does accept the Bible as the authoritative Word of God; we do so critically, however, recognizing that cultural, temporal, experiential, theological, and contextual elements of the text raise questions that must be asked - and a literal understanding of the text very often lacks integrity; the United Methodist Church does affirm membership in our church for those who claim the God made known in Jesus but acknowledges there are many, many ways to understand the God of Jesus; and we do indeed have a doctrine - but we don't force people to accept it; we invite consideration and conversation where questions are welcome).

There are so very many examples like these which highlight the point of Jesus' interaction with the Sadducees, calling them out for their game, but doing so in reference to the games we all so often get caught up in as human beings. We often expend our life's capital on things that seem life worthy but may only be a distraction. Conceptualization and thought exercises can become just that - a distraction from what holds true value. And what holds value must place God above any convention.

To make sense of this world, we do need guidelines and parameters and social arrangements that are conducive to a cohesive community. We often get these things wrong or set rules and parameters that do not serve all of us well, and so we must keep working on this world we find ourselves in. The counsel of Scripture, the wisdom of history, and the insight of experiences are all essential to improvement of the here and now. But the counsel of scripture, the wisdom of history, and the insights of experience tell us little of the reality that comes after our time here. We must turn to God for this, God's revelation in Jesus, God's movement in our lives through the spirit. All that is really given to us is that those who are open to, and invested in, God will be embraced by God, for all time; we will dwell in a reality beyond comprehension, but a reality in which we are somehow more alive than we are now. Our God is not God of the dead, but of the living; this is the one constant for both this world and what lies beyond.

I'd like to share one last thing with you; this is something I read from Oluwatomisin Oredein, a ruling elder in the Presbyterian Church USA, who teaches black religious traditions, constructive theology, and ethics at Brite Divinity School. He has this to say about the separation between material reality and what lies beyond. "People spend their entire lives falling into cultural expectations, such as marrying (or being married off). These are the walls of their lives, the place in which they live—their religion. Their prescribed social roles become their liturgy. [Many if not most people] have shaped their spiritual thinking in this direction.

But to fulfill cultural expectation is to take up residence in that particular age, [not beyond]. [There will be many times when] the social aspects of life collide with questions of the afterlife; [perhaps it is unavoidable to envision heaven in temporal ways], but Jesus has an answer: stop trying to combine the two. Don't force temporary life into the mold of permanence. God is God not of the dead but of the living." Amen!