

In our gospel this morning, Jesus is questioned by the Sadducees. The Sadducees were Jews who did not believe in resurrection – in life after death, unlike the Pharisees who did. Dave Johnson said his seminary professor helped them remember the distinction by saying, “The Sadducees did not believe in resurrection. That’s why they were sad...you see.”

So the group that was sad, you see, gives Jesus a complex kind of word problem. It’s not a real question in search of a real answer. It is a thinly veiled joke designed to show Jesus what a fool he was for believing in the resurrection from the dead. As usual, Jesus doesn’t take the bait. He even uses the logic of their own argument against them, showing that Moses himself *“showed that the dead are raised.”*

I started thinking this week about why the Sadducees were sad you see. I started thinking about what it would be like to believe that this life is the only life, that it all ends in our death, that what awaits us is oblivion. I started thinking about Albert Camus, the brilliant novelist, the French existentialist whose writing is filled with deep insight into the human heart, but also a bleak Sadducee-like appraisal of what it all comes down to. He once said, *“I do not like to believe that death opens upon another life. To me it is a door that shuts.”*

Of course, death is a door that shuts on everyone. Death is the one unalterable fact of life. Yet again, I turn to the satirical newspaper “The Onion” for proof.

*“World Health Organization officials expressed disappointment Monday at the group's finding that, despite the enormous efforts of doctors, rescue workers and other medical professionals worldwide, the global death rate remains constant at 100 percent. Responsible for 100 percent of all recorded fatalities worldwide, the condition has no cure.*

*“I was really hoping, what with all those new radiology treatments, rescue helicopters, aerobics TV shows and what have you, that we might at least make a dent in it this year,” WHO Director General Dr. Gernst Bladt said. “Unfortunately, it would appear that the death rate remains constant and total, as it has inviolably since the dawn of time.” “At this early date, I don't want to start making broad generalizations,” Citizens for Safety's Robert Hemmlin said, “but it is beginning to seem possible that birth—as well as the subsequent life cycle that follows it—may be a serious safety risk for all those involved.”*

Death is the great equalizer, for sure. But if, as the Sadducees believed, the door on your coffin is the final door and that death does not open up to another life, then there is enormous pressure to live your best life now. Pleasure, which is a gift from God, becomes tantamount and we become hedonists. Pain, which is also a gift from God, becomes unbearable and we fall into despair. Life is finally and decisively rendered meaningless by the final fact of death, and we become nihilists. That is the logical end of the door that shuts once and forever.

Yet, even Camus himself didn't or couldn't follow that logic in life. William Faulkner wrote an obituary for Camus. *"Camus said that the only true function of man, born into an absurd world, is to live, be aware of one's life, one's revolt, one's freedom. He said that if the only solution to the human dilemma is death, then we are on the wrong road. The right track is the one that leads to life, to the sunlight. One cannot unceasingly suffer from the cold."*

One cannot unceasingly suffer from the cold. Truer words were never spoken. Life has its lion's share of cold, but one cannot unceasingly suffer from it. The subsequent life cycle that follows our birth is filled with loss and suffering.

I've been thinking about the people of Haiti since my visit there 2 weeks ago. They have suffered more than their share it seems. Already a desperately poor nation, they experience the earthquake in January that left 1.5 million still homeless, the cholera outbreak 2 weeks ago, and now a Hurricane.

The trip was Bishop Shannon Johnston's first visit to Haiti; he said he was haunted by the number of people he saw with their heads hanging down, their hands covering their faces. (Stay tuned for more details on our establishing a relationship with a partner parish in Haiti. We have much to learn and to give to one another.)

The Haitians have had more than their share of suffering. But suffering cuts across every divide. Wealth does not protect us from suffering. The flying buttresses which serve to support our lives can crumble with a phone call. The Buddha is right in his First Noble Truth that Life is suffering: from birth life includes pain, disease, and ends in death. We experience suffering through frustration, loneliness, fear, and anger. This is a realistic (and biblical) rather than a pessimistic view of life. And we need relief and we need sunlight. We need hope, not just for the life to come, but for the life we're in.

According to Faulkner, Camus needed the sunlight too. *"He said, 'I do not like to believe that death opens upon another life. To me, it is a door that shuts.' That is, he tried to believe that. But he failed. Despite himself, as all artists do, he spent that life searching himself and demanding of himself answers which only God could know."*

Camus demanded answers of himself, which only God could know. And this brings us back to gospel and the Sadducees and to Jesus Christ, God Incarnate. And this brings us to the clearest and strongest and best thing that Christians have to offer a suffering world in need of sunlight.

It shows us that our present joy is experienced as a gift, but also a harbinger. It helps us make some sense of our suffering, that all we experience now will be used and redeemed. And finally, it is clarion news that gives our lives meaning and saves us from a nihilistic universe, life being only *"a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."*

When the Sadducees try to cajole Jesus into saying that death is the end, Jesus Christ says that God is not the God of the dead but the God of the living. Jesus Christ says that those who have been raised cannot die anymore. Jesus Christ not only affirms the idea of

resurrection, Jesus Christ says that He Himself is the Resurrection. *"I am the Resurrection and the Life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live."* If we are, as he says, the "children of the resurrection", then He Himself is the Person of the Resurrection.

Yes, death is a door that shuts and shuts on %100 of us. But in Jesus Christ, the Resurrection and the Life, the grave has become a gate, which we may pass through, as we pray in our funeral liturgy. The grave is now a gate which issues us into the place where *"indeed we cannot die anymore."* There is no better news for those who suffer from the cold.

All this is because of the Person of the Resurrection. Jesus Christ died for our sins, once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous. He experienced the unceasing cold of the cross and of the grave. The stone was sealed tight at the entrance of the tomb; there could be no sunlight filtering in. But *"the stone, it has been moved, the grave is now a groove, all debts have been removed."* Because Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, so shall we be raised from the dead.

I think we'll close with Bob Dylan, who is coming to town next week. This is a song we've sung recently as an offertory, a song in answer to anyone who is sad, you see. It's a song called "Death is Not the End."

*When you're sad and you're lonely, and you haven't got a friend  
Just remember that death is not the end  
And all that you held sacred falls down and does not bend  
Just remember that death is not the end.*

*When the storm clouds gather round you and the heavy rains descend  
Just remember that death is not the end  
And there's no one there to comfort you with a helping hand to lend  
Just remember that death is not the end.*

So, Happy Easter, everyone! Amen.