

Playing “Gotcha” with the Lord

Luke 20:27-40

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Have you ever been cornered? Backed against a wall? Felt pressured to make a particular choice or answer a question you didn't want to? Somewhere in the course of your life you have likely either done it to someone or had it done to you. Whether in a serious manner like a bank robber who says give me the money or else, or in a playful one like an unsolvable riddle, these are examples of what it means to play “gotcha.” Here's my favorite example of a “gotcha” moment. My dad told me this riddle all the time growing up. “If a chicken and a half can lay an egg and a half in a day and a half, how long would it take a grasshopper with a wooden leg to kick all the seeds out of a dill pickle?” If you want to test someone's intelligence and see if they really are as smart as they say they are, throw this one at them and you'll be able to say, “Gotcha!” There is no logical answer for it, and that is the intent of the question. It can't be answered and so all attempts to do so will end in failure.

That is essentially what the Sadducees think they are doing to Jesus in our text this morning. They've been scheming amongst themselves and they finally have the question that will stump this great teacher that is causing them so many problems. Using the rule of what is known as Levirate marriage from the Mosaic law (Deut. 25:5-10), they present this hypothetical and impossible question to the Lord, Jesus Christ. If one woman marries 7 brothers according to this law, whose will she be in the resurrection? Now, the important prerequisite of this question is stated in verse 27. These men do not believe in the resurrection of the dead, so in asking this question they are not only seeking to embarrass Jesus, but they are mocking God. They deny this doctrine of God and they deny that Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah who has come into the world. In posing this question to Jesus, whether they realize it or not, they are playing a dangerous game of “gotcha” with the Lord.

In His answer to their question, he essentially calls the Sadducees morons. Why in the world would you spend so much time coming up with a ridiculous question about who will be married to whom when there isn't even going to be marriage or death in the resurrection that you don't even believe in? Isn't this all too familiar for us in society as well? So often the world loves to try and play “gotcha” with Christians by trying to trap you in your beliefs. You can't call the alphabet soup community out for their sins because they will pose the question, “Didn't Jesus say you have to love your neighbor? How can you believe that and still be so mean to everyone?” And boy do they love to

Rev. Josh A. Killion
Trinity Lutheran Church - Austin, Texas
Third-Last Sunday (11/9/2025); Luke 20:27-40

take the Old Testament Law and rub it in your face. “You can’t condemn homosexuality because if you do then you have to abide by the whole Levitical law, and you don’t do any of those things.” Like the Sadducees willingly abiding in a false belief about the resurrection, the world is willingly abiding in unbelief and therefore lacks knowledge and understanding about the things of God.

But, just like Jesus, our answer in response to these attacks should not be defensive and aggravated. We simply use the Word of the Lord as our response. The Sadducees use the example of Moses’ Levirate marriage law to try and make Jesus admit there is no resurrection, because, logically, you can’t abide by the Law if all of your dead husbands are now alive. As I said a minute ago, Jesus’ response shuts them down before they can even get started in an argument, and He uses Moses as the example for shutting them down. They seek to make Moses an example of why there is no resurrection and the Lord uses Moses to prove why there is. Moses called God the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in our Old Testament lesson, and God is not a God of the dead, but of the living, as is evidenced in the Psalms, Isaiah, and Jeremiah (among others). They have no comeback for such a statement because they cannot deny what Christ has said. None of them dared ask him another question.

And that is what you have to deal with all the time. Even though the world doesn’t believe in the Lord, they seek to use Him against you. Even though they deny His vicarious atonement and seek to mock Him, He is used as their weapon and they try to use Him as a shield from their guilty conscience. You must constantly battle with the forces of the evil one as he seeks to do all he can to weaken and belittle the children of God. He uses the world to his advantage as he tries desperately to trap you in a “gotcha” moment that he can use to pull you away from Christ and the love He has for you. Like the men trying to throw Jesus of His game in our text, society is always trying to make you think there’s no way around their superior logic. That’s where they get it all wrong. Their logic is not their greatest strength, but their greatest weakness. Their reason is one which gives them false hope in nothing instead of the hope of eternal life in the one true God.

Your reason is a precious gift from the Most High, just as Luther says in his explanation of the First Article of the Apostles’ Creed, “I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them.” And your reason when kept in submission to God’s Word as servant, and not as king, is what allows you to understand what He has revealed to you in His promises. What He has given you is yours not because of what you do to earn it, but what He has done to earn it for you.

Eternal life awaits you through faith in Jesus Christ alone and the victory He has won over sin, death, and the devil. That is His promise to you. No matter the unworthiness of your sinful flesh, you will be raised up on the last day to live with Him.

Because that gift of eternal life is what you receive in the resurrection of the dead that has been promised to you, not because you deserve it or chose it, but because it is He that has given it to you out of His divine love and mercy. Jesus doesn't back you into a corner and force you into being raised to eternal life. You have the option to be raised to eternal death if you reject the Lord and all of His gifts, but you receive His gift of life only by faith. The only "gotcha" moment in Jesus' terms is the one where no matter what you do or how badly you fail, He's got it all covered. His death has made you righteous in the blood of the Lamb. His resurrection has guaranteed that you too will be raised with Him on the last day. By the water of Baptism, you have been given new life in Him, and that is a life that will carry into eternity, perfected in the light of His glory when you receive the inheritance that has been promised to you as sons of the living God.

Jesus doesn't have to play any games with the world. He already won the fight against the devil and his minions. He's vanquished the evil one and his hold over you and nothing in this world will ever change that reality. No amount of logic will undo the truth of the resurrection that awaits you and all the saints. We get a foretaste of that blessed resurrection when we gather at the Lord's table, as we physically eat and drink of the Lord's body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins. The presence of Jesus in the Sacrament of the Altar is the most real thing we can have on this side of heaven. He is truly present here, and the communion of saints is our portion in this meal. When you come to the rail you "rub elbows" with those who have attained the heavenly glory, but also wait for the same promise as you. What the Lord has won for all His children will be given in its fullest measure when the final trumpet sounds and the dead are raised, and we participate in the Lamb's High Feast in our glorified bodies.

The world around you is always going to try and play the "gotcha" game with your sinful flesh. It wants you to believe that because of your sin and indiscretions that there is no way you could possibly be redeemed by the blood of Jesus. That is the goal of the evil one. He wants to back you into a corner, giving you the impossible riddle of, "Jesus could never love someone as wretched as you. How could you possibly believe that anything He did was for you?" And your sinful flesh will believe every word of that if left to battle it on its own. But you are not alone. You battle the devil and his lies side by side with your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He does indeed love you, and He has died FOR YOU. His death was enough to redeem the entire world, and even though the devil knows that truth, he seeks to back you into a corner and force your hand into

answering his question with “I don’t know. He must not love me.” But when the devil messes with you, He is also messing with God, because you are His called children and heirs of His kingdom. He’s not just playing “gotcha” games with you, he is playing “gotcha” with the Lord, and that is a game he will never win.

The evidence of Christ’s love is all around you. In the blood He shed on the cross you can see what kind of love He has for you, because it is right here in front of you. By His blood shed for you and His body pierced for you, His love is on full display. He says as much in John 15:3, where He tells His disciples, “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.” There is no “gotcha” game that He is playing with your soul, only the proclamation of forgiveness, eternal life, and salvation for all who believe. That is what you will receive at His table in a few short moments as you physically touch and taste that the Lord is good and His love endures forever. That promise is sure and there is no impossible question to answer. Because of His love for you, you have been baptized into His death, and so have also been baptized into His resurrection. And you will be raised again on the last day, just as He promised in our Gospel lesson, reunited with your bodies to dwell in His presence as His beloved companions for all eternity. His glory will surround you, and no “gotcha” game will ever take that truth away from you, because it is yours now by faith, and will be then in that “sweet and blessed country” in the fullness of His glory forever. Amen.