



Opening Prayer for Ordinary Time

God of adventure and growth,
open our hearts, ready our minds
and fire our imaginations,
so that as we gather together before you,
and ponder the life-giving stories of Jesus,
we might discover more of your goodness,
and be swept up by the Holy Spirit
as she nurtures, disturbs and inspires us
on our journey into fullness of life. **Amen**

'Starter for Ten' Discussion Question

Have you ever found yourself caught up in an argument where both parties are convinced they are right? How did you handle this?

Prayers of Thanks and Praise – Psalm 98 (StF 820)

O sing to the Lord a new song,
for he has done marvellous things.
His right hand and holy arm have gained him victory.
The Lord has made known his victory;
he has revealed his vindication in the sight of the nations.
**He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness
to the house of Israel.**

All the ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God.

**Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth;
break forth into joyous song and sing praises.**

Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre,
with the lyre and the sound of melody.

**With trumpets and the sound of the horn
make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord.**

Let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
the world and those who live in it.

**Let the rivers clap their hands; let the hills sing
together for joy at the presence of the Lord,
for he is coming to judge the earth.**

**He will judge the world with righteousness
and the peoples with equity.**

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and shall be forever.

Amen

Prayers of Renewal

Jesus Christ is risen from the dead,
opening the way to everlasting life,
both in the here-and-now, and throughout all that is to come.
Let us therefore bring to God those things in need of renewal:

We bring to you those things for which we are sorry:
Restore us and heal us.

We bring to you the times we've failed to love one another:
Restore us and heal us.

We bring to you the burdens we carry and sorrows we bear:
Restore us and heal us.

We bring to you the injustices and oppression in our world:
Restore us and heal us.

We bring to you the failings and disunity of your Church:

Restore us and heal us.

Silence is kept for a few moments...

God of new beginnings,
of love stronger than even death,
you set us free from the past,
to flourish in the future.

Thank you that you forgive us, restore us,
and breathe new life into us.

Amen

Reading Luke 20:27 – 38

Sermon

I am not the sportiest person in the world, but I do sometimes find it helpful to have something on in the background when I am working, and snooker is one of my favourite sports. At the end of September, and the start of the new season, World Mixed Doubles Snooker was broadcast on terrestrial television for the first time. While it was clear that some of the male commentators found this somewhat awkward even as they tried pretty hard to be inclusive, it was a good example of how things are changing for the better. Everybody is made in the image of God, and infinitely valuable and precious to God; however, our world doesn't always reflect divine reality.

Luke's Gospel places great emphasis upon God's identification with those pushed to the margins of society, and Jesus's countercultural responses to people he met. I wonder if that is why Luke decided to include the incident described in this reading. The Sadducees were among the major groups within a diverse Jewish culture. They were religiously conservative; they regarded only the five Books of Moses as authoritative scripture, and focused upon the system of sacrifices

in the Jerusalem Temple. This combination led them to reject claims of any 'resurrection from the dead', in contrast to the Pharisees and Scribes. Yet, after the Temple was destroyed by the Romans, in 70 CE, they faded away into insignificance to the point where Luke had to explain their beliefs (20:27). So, why mention them?

Well, Jesus' encounter with them took place after he had completed his long journey from Galilee to Jerusalem, and entered into the city in triumph. His first major act was to go into the Temple and overturn the tables of the traders, whose exchanges facilitated the system of sacrifices and burnt offerings (19:28 – 46). This led the Chief Priests and Scribes to want to kill him, restrained only by his popularity with the crowds (19:47 – 48). Hence, they challenged the authority under which Jesus was acting (20:1 – 8) and then attempted to entrap him (20:20 – 26) after he told the Parable of the Wicked Tenants against them (20:9 – 19). When all this failed, the Sadducees decided to try their luck, and by focusing on resurrection, hopefully embarrass the Pharisees in the process...

The practice of 'Levite marriage' was an ancient one, with its origins in Deuteronomy 25:5 – 10. In order to carry on family names and to ensure land was passed on, a widow who was childless could marry their late husband's brother, with any children regarded as offspring of the dead sibling. It must have been controversial, as Leviticus 20 contains prohibitions against marrying a brother's spouse. This was cited by Henry VIII when he wanted to extract himself from marriage to his late brother's widow, Catherine of Aragon, having been given a papal dispensation to wed her in the first place. As in Tudor times, in Jesus' day, a woman's body was not seen as her own over which to exercise genuine autonomy, yet that hypothetical scenario of the Sadducees takes all of that to the extreme.

In the story they told to Jesus in the Temple courtyard, a woman is pictured as remaining childless until death, despite being married to

all seven of the brothers in the one family. In the resurrection, whose wife would she be? His response to their question was twofold, and devastating. Firstly, he explained that they had misunderstood what resurrection implies; marriages aren't made in the new creation and our principal relationship is with God (20:34 – 36). Secondly, YHWH is affirmed as the God of the living in the foundational story of Moses and the burning bush (Exodus 3) – a passage which the Sadducees accepted as fully authoritative. In other words, their whole argument did not stand up to real scrutiny, to the point where even the Scribes approved of Jesus's rebuttal (20:39 – 40).

Now, given this backdrop, it might be that Luke opted to include this episode in his Gospel, and later refer to ongoing conflict in between the Pharisees and Sadducees (Acts 23:6 – 10), because the subject of resurrection was still a live one. However, I wonder if this decision is at least partly about challenging the misogyny inherent within the Sadducees' question. In the story, the woman was regarded as little better than an item of property, to be passed from brother to brother in pursuit of a male heir for the family name and lands. Jesus makes it clear that the life of the new creation is not like this, and we are all children of God (20:36). Moreover, as we see elsewhere such as in 1 Corinthians 15:35 – 49, resurrection is not about the disembodied soul of much popular perception, but about God's renewal of *whole people*, including of our bodies. The woman in the story was treated as many were in real life, as if their bodies did not matter, but this is not the case in the Kingdom of God.

Given that, even in 2022, modes of discrimination and of deepening poverty show us how many people's bodies still are not treated with the value God ascribes, the role of the Church must be to challenge such injustices. After all, if people cannot see God's Kingdom within us, how are they supposed to place their trust in it, when God calls? Today's text may appear abstract, but it has real world implications. May we seize the moment, and model resurrection life today. Amen

Prayers of Intercession

God of freedom and hope,
you came to bring good news to the poor.
We pray for all those who struggle to make ends meet,
for those having to choose between food and heating,
and those who are worried about what the future holds.
God of endless love, **hear our prayer.**

God of freedom and hope,
you came to bring release to the captives.
We pray for prisoners of conscience throughout the world,
for those living under oppressive regimes and dictatorships,
and the work of human rights organisations and advocates.
God of endless love, **hear our prayer.**

God of freedom and hope,
you came to bring recovery of sight to the blind.
We pray for everyone who struggles to trust they are loved,
for those blinded by affluence, self-interest or greed,
and all those who have lost sight of you in the midst of life.
God of endless love, **hear our prayer.**

God of freedom and hope,
you came to bring freedom to the oppressed.
We pray for those experiencing isolation and loneliness,
for all victims and survivors of abuse of any kind,
and those struggling with ill health in body, mind or spirit.
God of endless love, **hear our prayer.**

Lord's Prayer

Blessing