

If we follow a secular line of reason only, we will fail. The Sadducees are trying to catch Jesus out in just this way for they are trapped inside a mentality that is essentially worldly, or land based, and has no room for the bigger picture of a cosmos, a creation, intimately linked or founded on the possibility of God, or rather God's possibilities. It's all about first premises, and they fool themselves into thinking that heaven, that God, can be thought of in terms of earthly possibilities only – so the argument about the woman's true husband in heaven is based on a law on earth designed to keep the first husband's land within the same patrimony, within the same family. We can easily fall into this trap ourselves by trying to think of heaven, of God, in earthly terms. In some sense we have to – thinking in earthly terms, in terms that is of an imagination formed by earthly experience, is not a choice but a necessity for us – for we are not God, and so we project onto heaven all our hopes and fears and imagine heaven and life after death and God, in this way or that with no certainty ever that this is really what heaven or life after death or God, is really like. It's all metaphor in this respect. Jesus undercuts this whole way of thinking by simply stating that 'God' is God not of the dead but of the living; for to him all people (all things perhaps) are alive or, interestingly in the RSV, ' for all live to him'. Of course words themselves are metaphorical, in one sense at least, but again we have to use them – and use them best when we understand their limitations.

I've come up against this most immediately recently in talking about Br Herbert's death. People will say to me you must be devastated, you must be sad, how are you coping being on your own and so on . And I don't want to disappoint them but I don't actually feel like that at all and I stumble to meet their expectations by saying things like : well it's wonderful because I now have someone in heaven who is there to greet me when it's my turn to go (of course I may be sadly mistaken in this). But what I'm really doing here is trying to cope with other people's grief in a secular way and it fails if that is all it's about. Because the deeper reality is that of Jesus knowing that God cannot be limited by our earthly expectations – how Jesus knows this, and why I believe it, is not a matter of speculation but of faith. ' Taste it and see' one might say'. Grief of course is there too, but it's not the end of the matter just as suffering and all the human emotions were present to Jesus too – he wasn't a robot or an angel after all, but a fully enfleshed human being, and, dare one say, knew God in a way as uncertain as the rest of us. So perhaps it's about embracing uncertainty only to find that it works, that the life of grace is there for us always, that resurrection in a sense begins now because whatever heaven is in our own time -and place- bound imagination – the reality is always more than this and speaks to us now in ways at which we can only wonder. We wait on God, put out trust in God, and find ourselves continually surprised -a logic of uncertainty which only a God of both the living and the dead can deliver or fulfil. And so the adventure continues.

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