

There can be a tremendous difference between here and there. A young woman discovered this for herself in the year 1849 when she walked over the Pennsylvania state line and into a land where the law of slavery had no power over her. By stepping over that line, there became here, and she became a free woman. It was a powerful, transformative moment filled with the Presence of God. As the woman who would shortly thereafter give herself the name Harriet Tubman described it, she said: "When I crossed that line, I looked at my hands to see if I was the same person. There was such a glory over everything; the sun came like gold through the trees and over the fields, and I felt like I was in Heaven." Perhaps that is when a slave transformed into a free woman went on to become a genuine American hero, all because she went from one place to another, not just geographically or physically, but spiritually, legally, mentally, and emotionally. She began learning a way of being that she barely imagined before she crossed that line. Once she experienced it, she loved her freedom so much, and saw it truly is how God intends all people to live, she couldn't be satisfied or comfortable until she had gone back over that line countless times in order to bring others into that same freedom.

That feeling of awe Harriet Tubman had going across the state line into a life she could barely imagine before hand is a little glimmer of the resurrection life Jesus was talking about in today's Gospel lesson.

Although many people confuse today's Gospel with being about marriage, the question posed to Jesus by the Sadducees only used marriage in an attempt to prove their belief that the way things are is the way they were meant to be. Because marriage can be an emotional subject, it is easy to get distracted by it. Especially if a person has lost a spouse. While it can be easy to get distracted by those emotions, doing so can cause us to miss the powerful point Jesus was making about resurrection life, and the hope that is for all of us.

The question posed to Jesus used a certain law of marriage that was already long out of practice in Jesus' day. It was described in the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy; the purpose of it was three-fold. It provided economic security for the widow; first by a husband and later in life by children. Remember, in the ancient world there were no financial institutions to help with retirement planning; the only retirement plan was children who could do the labor for a person when they were physically or mentally unable to work. The other purpose was to keep any property, which unfortunately could be considered the widow herself, in the family clan or tribe.

And finally, this type of marriage was to ensure the man who died would not be forgotten, at least in name, as his name was to be kept alive beyond his death by his child.

There are many reasons why people get married, both in the ancient world and in our modern times. Sometimes people marry for economic security, or to form political alliances, or to avoid loneliness. Historians tell us marrying for love alone is a fairly new practice, historically speaking.

But the people who asked Jesus the question were not worried about marriage as much as they were attempting to prove to Jesus that belief in the resurrection was a flawed and heretical belief. The Sadducees, as we heard in the first sentence of today's Gospel did not believe in the resurrection. This made them different from the Pharisees, who did. The Sadducees are not mentioned much in the Gospels. Biblical scholars tell us they were a wealthy, aristocratic and religiously conservative priestly class who were responsible for the temple. However, they were politically cooperative with Rome. One New Testament scholar described the Sadducees as aristocrats anxious for their own power.

Which might be why Jesus' response to their question was to point out to the Sadducees that the resurrection isn't going to be anything like a continuation of the world as they know it. It is a life, as New Testament scholar N. T. Wright says, after life after death. In such a life, marriage as we know it won't be necessary because there is no death in resurrection life, so there is no need for reproduction, no need to create family units for the raising and providing for children who will carry on a family name and tradition. In the resurrection life no one will be considered property, so there will be no need to provide economic security marriage is sometimes used for. Because there will be no death in resurrection life, Paul writes we will even be given new bodies, bodies suited for that resurrection life. There will be relationships, but they will be different.

The trouble seems to be for Sadducees, they could not imagine something different from what they already knew. And we need to be careful about judging them too harshly for this, because we can be just as guilty of this lack of imagination.

Harriet Tubman seemed to have faced a similar frustration during her days as conductor on the Underground Railroad and when she worked with the Union Army during the Civil War to liberate people from slavery. "I freed a thousand slaves," Harriet Tubman is believed to have said, "I could have freed a thousand more if only they knew were slaves." This quote was tenderly and compassionately explored in a new movie about Harriet Tubman's life called *Harriet*. This movie includes scenes where Harriet returned to the plantation where she had been a slave in order to get her family members to come with her to freedom. While some eagerly went with her,

others refused, saying they were not willing to leave the only life they knew, because it would mean leaving other family and friends. They could not nor did not want to imagine a different way of living, much less take the risks to live into it.

While this might be hard for us to imagine, I have seen this mindset with people who chose to stay in abusive relationships or toxic workplaces, or who just don't ever try to leave a job they are unhappy with in order to pursue a career they have always wanted. There is a certain security in what they know, even if it is a source of unhappiness. The ability or skill to imagine or think of something completely different than what we know is one not everyone knows how or is able or even wants to practice.

The same is true when it comes to the resurrection. Something we mention every time we recite the words of the Nicene Creed, which we will do once again shortly. Many think of the resurrection as life after death, a continuation of what we already know. For many that is a comforting thought, and I do not want to take away anyone's comfort today. But theologians and scholars as well as New Testament writers and even Jesus himself had things to say about it. We can see in today's Gospel Jesus is sure and certain of the resurrection. Biblical scholars tell us that the early followers of Jesus kept telling the story of Jesus' encounter with the Sadducees in today's Gospel because Jesus' resurrection showed God can and did act decisively to reverse death, which means God can and will act decisively one day to overturn the ways of the world as we know it, and when that happens, wrongs will be put to rights, death will be no more, and God will wipe every tear from our faces. But that will probably not feel all that good to those who have the power in the world as it works now. And that is probably why there are folks who don't want to imagine a world different from the one they know.

But just because something is hard to imagine doesn't mean it isn't true. Or that it doesn't have any hope for us all. Jesus' own resurrection is said to be the first fruits, a foretaste of the resurrection life to come. It is a life marked by what was but not limited by the past because it is a life centered on the Love of God, who loves us so much, Paul writes in his letter to the Christians in Rome God isn't going to let death separate us from God. That is how Paul imagines resurrection life, and it is part of what inspired him to tell people far and wide about the love of God in Christ.

Twentieth century Christian apologist C. S. Lewis imagined resurrection life in his book *The Great Divorce*, where the divorce isn't about marriage, it's about divorcing ourselves from the world we know in order to live into resurrection life. Doing so, according to Lewis, required letting go of power we hold over others when we hold grudges, are jealous, or controlling. Is this the way resurrection life will be? Who knows? But it is an attempt to imagine the possibilities of what it means to live into a

way of being that is centered on God's love for us. Where we can all be free from the power of death, fear, greed, corruption, anxiety, and all the sins that cause harm, and inspire to live a bit closer into that resurrection life in this world, because the resurrection shows us those things don't have to have power over us, even now.

Which brings us back to Harriet Tubman's transformation when she stepped from here to there, into a world of freedom she had barely imagined. She glimpsed more than legal freedom when she stepped across that state line, she glimpsed a bit of what resurrection life is, and that may be what gave her the strength and courage to try and bring as many other human beings as she could out of the evil of slavery.

Her life shines with that resurrection life and can inspire us to keep living into what we believe or say we believe, even if we can't imagine it. We don't have to let those sins have power over us. And we can tell others by what we say and do that no matter how hard or frightening things get there is hope because God loves us so tremendously, we mean the world to God and God won't let anything destroy what means the world to God. God's love will bring us from here to there, and we'll know what Harriet Tubman felt when resurrection life broke into this world, and it will be Heaven.