For the past three months we have been preaching a series of sermon called *Journeys with Jesus through the Gospel of Luke.* Week by week we have followed Jesus on the path of Christian discipleship. And during this journey, we’ve learned a lot and seen a lot all along the way. But where is this journey leading us? Where is it taking us? According to today’s reading, it is leading us to a resurrection. As we confess every week in the Apostles’ Creed, it is leading us to the resurrection of the body and to life everlasting.

But not everyone believes in a resurrection of the body. According to a 1997 Times/CNN survey, only 26% of the Americans then surveyed believed in a bodily resurrection. Now that’s no new phenomenon. The Sadducees of Jesus’ day denied the resurrection too.

You see, the Sadducees were a party that adhered only to the first five books of the Bible, the books of Moses – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. In addition to adhering only to these five books, they also denied the existence of angels, the existence of spirits, and the reality of resurrection. So a group of Sadducees approached Jesus one day with a scenario designed to discredit any belief in a bodily resurrection.

“Some Sadducees, those who say there is no resurrection, came to him and asked him a question, ‘Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies, leaving a wife but no children, the man shall marry the widow and raise up children for his brother. Now there were seven brothers; the first married, and died childless; then the second and the third married her, and so in the same way all seven died childless. Finally the woman also died. In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had married her.’”

You can almost see the Sadducees settling back with smug smiles feeling they have trapped Jesus by their clever question. But then Jesus answered and said, “Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage; but those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. Indeed they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection.” With these words Jesus seems to suggest that marriage won’t be needed in heaven because no one will die so there will be no need for marriage and procreation.

Now I must confess that I am sometimes saddened whenever I read these words of Jesus. He seems to say that I won’t be married to my wife in the world of resurrection. And if you knew how much I love her, and how much of life we’ve shared, and how much sweeter our marriage grows with the passage of each day, then you would know precisely why these words of Christ can make me melancholy. And not me only, I
suppose. I suspect many of you may feel the same upon some measure of reflection. For if our closest earthly relationships are disrupted in the world to come, then who among us would ever want to go there?

The other day my wife and daughter were waiting in a doctor’s office. My daughter was playing with her favorite stuffed animal, a little tiger named Stripes. Suddenly she stopped playing, looked at my wife with a troubled expression, and asked, “Mommy, will the world ever come to an end?” My wife said, “Yes. Someday Jesus will come back and will take his people to live with him in heaven.” My daughter asked, “Will stuffed animals be allowed in heaven?” “I’m not sure,” my wife replied. Upon hearing this, my daughter began to cry. “If Stripes can’t go to heaven with me then I don’t want to go,” she said. My wife is no theologian but I think she got it right when she replied, “Sweetheart, if you need Stripes to be happy in heaven then I think God will let him in.”

In saying that, I think my wife hit on a sound biblical principle. That principle is this: There are no losses in heaven. Heaven is only gain. When the apostle Paul was in prison, faced with the possibility of death, he wrote a little letter to the Church at Philippi and said, “For to me to live is Christ, to die is gain.” (Philippians 1:21 NIV) No, there are no losses in heaven. Heaven is always and only gain. Whatever my relationship will be with my wife in heaven, whatever my relationships with others will be there, those relationships will be better, richer, deeper, and sweeter than ever they were on the earth below – for heaven is only gain.

And best of all, we’ll all see Jesus! What a day of rejoicing that will be. To quote Paul, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far…” (Philippians 1:21-23 NIV)

Better by far! Resurrection to eternal life will be better by far than the little lives we live below. For if all of our earthly intimacies bring us such happiness down here, if all of our friends and families bring us such earthly joy, then how much more joy will they bring us in the world to come, the world where every relationship is perfected and made infinitely sweet? And how much more joy will we find when together with friends and family we’re finally face to face with Jesus Christ? Why it’s hard to fathom.

But all of this is only true if there is a resurrection. All of this is only true if there is a world to come? So is there a resurrection? Is there a world to come? Job seemed to think so. In the midst of his suffering he said, “I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see on my side, and my eyes shall behold, and not another.” (Job 19:25-27) Job’s voice is only one among the many Old Testament witnesses to the promise of resurrection.

Yes, many of the Old Testament prophets believed in the resurrection of the body and life everlasting to include Moses himself. Referencing Moses’ encounter with God at the
burning bush, as told in Exodus, one of the five books revered by the Sadducees, Jesus said, “...the fact that the dead are raised Moses himself showed, in the story about the bush, where he speaks of the Lord as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive.”

What Jesus references here is God’s comment to Moses in Exodus 3:6 where God said to Moses, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Notice, God didn’t say, “I was the God of your father.” Instead, he said, “I am the God of your father,” implying that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were still alive to God.

Yes, Jesus, Job, Moses, and many of the prophets believed in the resurrection and in the world to come. And Jesus proved the reality of it not long after his encounter with the Sadducees by rising from the dead and ascending into heaven. For just a few days later, Jesus was crucified, died, and was buried. But on the third day he rose again and then ascended into heaven.

Luke 24:1-5 describes the scene. “(O)n the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, ‘Why do look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.’” And Luke 24:50-51 goes on to say, the Risen Christ, “led (the disciples) out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven.”

So what does all this mean for us? Is Christ’s conflict with the Sadducees just a curious incident, or does it have some meaning for us, living as we do in the 21st century? Well I believe it has eternal significance.

First, this encounter reminds us that there is a resurrection; there is a world to come. The prophets believed it, the Bible teaches it, and Jesus proved it by his own resurrection and ascension into heaven.

Second, this encounter reminds us that life beyond the resurrection will be a better life by far. Whatever our relationships will be in heaven with those we love, we know they’ll be better, deeper, richer, and sweeter than they are down here in the world below; for there are no losses in heaven. Heaven is only gain.

Finally, this encounter reminds us that only God’s children enjoy resurrection to eternal life. As Jesus said in Luke 20:35-36, “…those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead...cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God...”

My friend, are you a child of God? You can be, but you must first be born again to become a child of God; for you are not a child of God by natural birth. Instead, you
become a child of God by spiritual birth. And that birth comes whenever you believe in and receive Jesus as your Savior. In the words of John 1:11-13: “He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.” (NIV)

My friend, in a moment we’ll celebrate communion with Jesus Christ and you’ll be invited to receive the bread of his body and the cup of his blood. If you are not now a child of God, I urge you to pray this prayer as you communion: “Lord Jesus, I believe you are the Son of God and Savior of the world. I believe you died in my place, for my sin, as my substitute, thus bearing in my place the penalty for my sin. I receive you as my Savior. Please share your Sonship with me and make me a child of God that I may journey with you through life and death to a glorious resurrection.” Amen.

If you pray that prayer, please tell someone; for the Bible says, “…if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” (Romans 10:9-10 KJV)

If you are already a child of God then give thanks to him as you commune with Christ because this table on earth is an emblem of that table in heaven where the children of God will sit down and dine forever in sweet fellowship with Jesus. Praise God for the resurrection! Amen!