

活人的上帝 The God of the Living

Luke 20:27–38

November 9, 2025

Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost

ATPC

Once, my mother called me on FaceTime so that I could chat with my grandmother. But my grandma was so worried about the cost of the call that she kept trying to hang up. Even after my mother repeatedly explained that it was free, Grandma still doubted it might be expensive and refused to talk for long. Twenty years ago, an overseas call could cost around a dollar per minute, but today, with an internet connection, all calls are unlimited and free.

Each era has its own set of worries, and many of the old ones have been replaced by technological progress. In today's scripture, Jesus debates with the Sadducees—and through that debate, he contrasts the present age with the age to come, breaking through misconceptions about faith and revealing that God is the God of the living. Let us look together at this passage to rethink what kind of relationship we should have with the “God of the living.”

The Context of the Scripture

From June until now, we have been following the Gospel of Luke through the lectionary—journeying with Jesus from chapter 9 to 19, from Galilee all the way to Jerusalem. Once in Jerusalem, Jesus' ministry of challenging people's faith reached its climax. In chapter 20, Jesus is confronted three times by powerful Jerusalem authorities: first by the chief priests, elders, and scribes; then by their spies; and finally, in today's text, by the Sadducees.

Each group comes with different questions—about authority, taxes, and, finally, resurrection. But their common goal is not to seek truth; they want to humiliate Jesus or trap him into saying something punishable.

Their motive was simple: Jesus was threatening their influence in Jerusalem. At the end of chapter 19, Jesus drives out those buying and selling in the temple. Biblical scholars have demonstrated that these temple markets served as a means for the religious elite to generate income. When Jesus expelled them, he disrupted the income of the priests, Pharisees, and scribes.

The Sadducees, another influential Jewish group, read only the Torah (the five books of Moses). They did not recognize the Prophets or other parts of the Hebrew Bible and did not believe in the resurrection (20:27). Instead, they believed that divine reward and punishment occurred only in this life. Jesus' teaching of his own death and resurrection directly challenged their theology and undermined their authority.

Theological Debate

So, the Sadducees devised a clever case to prove that resurrection was an absurd belief, inconsistent with the Law of Moses. According to Deuteronomy 25, if a man dies without a child, his brother must marry the widow to continue his brother's family line.

The Sadducees then asked: if resurrection were real, whose wife would that woman be after all seven brothers had married her in succession?

It was an impressive logical argument—but to Jesus, it was like my grandmother worrying about long-distance phone charges. It was a real problem in one era, but not in the next. In the age to come, when people are raised, that problem will no longer exist.

Jesus answered that after the resurrection, people will be like angels, who neither marry nor are given in marriage. Then he turned their own Scriptures against them, quoting Moses' encounter with God in the burning bush: if there were no resurrection, why would God say, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob"—long after they had died? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living; for to God, all are alive.

Jesus used their own perfect logic to expose the pride in their reasoning. But his goal was not to defend his authority—it was to free them from wasting time on fruitless debates about resurrection and to redirect them to what truly matters.

Too often, when we discuss matters of faith, we forget that our God is the God of the living—not a God who judges, condemns, or kills. This does not mean that theological reflection is useless, but it warns us against turning faith into either an ivory tower or a guillotine. The ivory tower locks believers in their own imagination; the guillotine busily cuts down everyone who disagrees. In both cases, we risk turning God into a "God of the dead."

The Stranger

In twentieth-century France, after two world wars had drained people's optimism, existentialism—an often-somber philosophy focused on the present moment—rose to prominence. In that context, the writer Albert Camus published *The Stranger* (*L'Étranger*), a classic of existentialist literature that won him the Nobel Prize. The novel exposes the absurdity and unpredictability of human nature and society.

The story takes place in Algeria. Its protagonist, Meursault, is emotionally detached. At his mother's funeral, he feels only irritation at the heat. Later, during an outing to the beach, he accidentally shoots and kills a man he does not even know. At his trial, the court calls witnesses from the nursing home and the cemetery—not to discuss the killing, but to testify that Meursault had shown no grief at his mother's funeral. They accuse him of being cold and inhuman.

What makes the novel fascinating is that it offers no clear moral boundary—only a piling up of seemingly logical yet absurd events. It is true that Meursault did not cry at his mother's funeral, but why must one pretend to grieve when one feels nothing? And though he killed a man, why is the blinding sunlight that reminded him of the funeral's heat irrelevant in court, while his lack of tears becomes the key evidence of his guilt?

Before his execution, a priest visits Meursault, urging him to repent. Meursault becomes furious. To him, the priest's so-called faith is merely a set of ideological chains controlling his every move, making him a puppet. Camus portrays the priest as someone who speaks about God but has never truly lived. He suppresses his feelings and never acts out of authentic conviction. Meursault says, "He lives like a dead man. And I? I may have empty hands, but I am sure of myself—sure of my life and of the death that is coming. I have only this truth, but at least I grasp it."

The God of the Living

In his debate with the Sadducees, Jesus reminds us not to use a dead framework of faith to understand the living God. The Sadducees denied resurrection through rational calculation, but Jesus revealed through life itself that the relationship between God and humanity is not broken

by death. God still calls himself “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob,” showing that although these ancestors’ bodies had died, they remain remembered, loved, and connected in God’s presence.

The God of the living does not ask us to define faith but invites us to experience divine presence in our living moment. Like the Sadducees, we often try to trap God within our own systems and guard our sense of truth with religious logic. But faith is not a philosophical contest—it is a lived posture toward life itself. It is not about clutching a perfect answer but about trusting boldly when nothing is yet certain.

The resurrection Jesus speaks of is not merely a future miracle but a present reality. Whenever people are freed from fear, power, or oppressive systems, they already begin to live a resurrected life.

Camus’s *The Stranger* echoes this insight. Though Meursault does not believe in God, he refuses to fake emotions and faces his feelings honestly. Condemned by society, he nevertheless finds a kind of freedom as he faces death. He reminds us not to let faith become a lifeless ideology that only speaks of truth but never dares to live it. A faith that exists only to preserve doctrines and institutions becomes like the priest’s faith—full of God’s name but empty of life.

The God revealed in Jesus is the opposite. God is the God of the living—the God who walks among people, eats with sinners, and defends the poor; the God who has wept, laughed, bled, and risen again. The resurrection is not an abstract idea or a dazzling miracle; it is a transformation of our world from the logic of death into the reality of life.

Perhaps we, too, sometimes feel the absurdity of life like Meursault or use reason as our defense like the Sadducees. Yet Jesus invites us to choose—to love, to live, to trust—even amid absurdity and contradiction. For God is not the God of the dead but of the living. Because God lives, we can live authentically; because God loves, love can live again in this world.

May we become witnesses of this “God of the living”—not only believing in God’s existence but truly living with God in our everyday lives.

Let us pray: *Ever-living God, we thank you, for you are not bound by time, space, or death. You are the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob—and you are our God.*

Every breath and heartbeat carries your life-giving blessing.

Lord, we confess that we often act like the Sadducees—trapping you in our logic and replacing true encounter with rigid faith. We argue over right and wrong, defend our positions, and forget that you are not a dead doctrine but the God who calls us to live out love and freedom.

Forgive our cold hearts, our pretenses born of fear, and our rigid piety. Awaken us again through Jesus' words to believe that resurrection is not only future hope but also our present breath and courage. When, like Meursault, we feel the absurdity and emptiness of the world, may your Spirit remind us that you are still with us—that your love is stronger than death, and your light can pierce even the deepest despair.

May we live because of you, and may the world be awakened through our love. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, who was crucified, risen, and forever present with us. Amen.