

A six-year-old child asks her parents where babies come from. After a deep breath, they launch into their very best age-appropriate effort to explain. After an hour or so has gone by, and the exhaustive account has reached its end, one parent adds: “by the way, why did you want to know?” The child answers that her best friend said her new baby brother came from the hospital.

A group of Sadducees pose a question to Jesus that begins with a hypothetical based on “levirate marriage.” In that tradition: if a husband dies, an unmarried brother of his has the responsibility to marry the widow. In the Sadducees’ construct, this happens to the same woman not once but seven times. *So tell us, Jesus: in the resurrection, whose wife will this woman be?* It was not a question asked by bereaved widows or widowers, whose grieving seeks comfort. It was a question asked by a group who did not believe there was any life beyond the grave. It was a question with no interest save to entrap Jesus. It is likely no coincidence that this story in Luke follows right after another loaded story and question intended to land Jesus in hot water with Jewish patriots or Roman oppressors: “Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to the emperor or not?”

If the answer Jesus gives to the Sadducees does not seem to answer such wondering about the afterlife – that was not the question being asked. To that question, resurrection, Jesus throws down a gauntlet in his answer. The text he appeals to comes from the only scriptural authority recognized by the Sadducees: the Torah. Jesus challenges their unspoken disbelief in resurrection by appealing to the figure the Sadducees would have regarded as the main source and teacher of Torah: Moses. In the end, a question based on a strained hypothetical is answered by the gospel’s proclamation of the One who is God not of the dead but the living.

For Reflection and Action:

When have you found yourself in the place of those parents; in the place of that child?

Where do you see, or experience, questions posed that do not seek answers but entrapment?

What one question would you ask Jesus about life after resurrection; why?