

Matthew Potts: May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength, and our redeemer, amen.

congregation: Amen.

Matthew Potts: It's in this passage from Luke that the midshipmen read just a few moments ago. The big beef that the Sadducees have with Jesus is about resurrection. That's a fairly important concept for us Christians, I think.

Matthew Potts: There's a way in which, I mean the way we read a text. We almost dismiss the Sadducees for their doubt in the resurrection. The Sadducees, who do not believe in the resurrection. But this is a difficult thing. Resurrection's a tricky thing, even for those of us who call ourselves Christians.

Matthew Potts: Just as an example, I have three young children, Milly, Sammy, and Danny. My oldest Milly, is almost 10 now. But when she was almost five. I think maybe she was just five. Easter, several years ago. A few years ago. It was Easter season, so we were talking about resurrection, and in Sunday school she was hearing about resurrection.

Matthew Potts: We were in the kitchen. My wife Colette and I were in the kitchen with Milly. Milly turned to Colette and said, "Did Jesus really raise from the dead? How did he do that?" Colette listened to her patiently, and got down close to her, and looked her in the eye.

Matthew Potts: You know, it's a four year old, the first time you're getting ... you feel like these explanations carry some weight, you got to do it right. So she gets down on Milly's level and looks her in the eye, and very tenderly, very patiently said to her, "Milly, why don't you go talk to Daddy?"

Matthew Potts: It's tricky stuff, right. Even if we wanted to dismiss the Sadducees. Now the Sadducees are a complicated group within ancient Judea. I want to talk more about them. But this is important to us, this concept of resurrection, for us as Christians, not just because it's what's at stake in this lesson. But it's also what's at stake in us when we say that Jesus is raised from the dead.

Matthew Potts: But it's also what's at stake on a morning like this, when we remember the dead. We remember the lives of those that have been lost, and gone before us. So let me tell you a word about these, the Sadducees. It's true that they did not believe in the resurrection, as scripture tells us. But there were a lot more to them than that.

Matthew Potts: The Sadducees were the elite. The Sadducees ran the temple. The priests and high priests were Sadducees. And this is not unimportant in our story this morning at the ... where our lesson takes place in the story of Jesus. Because what has just happened is Palm Sunday. Jesus has just entered Jerusalem triumphantly. And guess what he did first when he got there, he went to the

temple, and overthrew all the tables and the money changers. He has challenged the economy of temple practice, right in front of all these Sadducees who run the temple.

Matthew Potts: So when they come to him asking this question, it isn't just a interesting academic poser. They're challenging him because they have been challenged. And guess what, in the verses following this, Jesus is going to turn to his disciples and say, "All this will be thrown down. This temple will be thrown down. Not one stone will be left upon another."

Matthew Potts: The stakes are high here, in this encounter between the Sadducees and Jesus, because the charges against Jesus that will be brought will be charges about his blasphemy in front of the Sadducees, what he said about the temple. And the people who conscript Judas into going and betraying Jesus, and arresting Jesus, will be the priests, and the high priest, Sadducees.

Matthew Potts: What sounds like an academic question ... Imagine there were seven brothers, actually has immensely high stakes in the life of Jesus, and in our question about resurrection. But I am an academic, right. I teach at Lavidia School, and if this sounds like an academic question, it's because it is kind of an academic question. It's highly speculative, and gives the most extreme example to try to test this concept. They're trying to confine Jesus into a corner and make him not have an answer to their question.

Matthew Potts: And honestly, Jesus' answer is not super satisfying. For a couple of reasons, at least at first glance it's not satisfying because ... I've pastored a church for 10 years. In those 10 years, I've several times met with people who were dying, and who said to me, despite whatever other fears they might have, who said to me they looked forward to being reunited with the beloved in the beyond. For them to hear Jesus say, "There's no marriage in the afterlife." That's not something, that's not a verse of Jesus' that I would use in that moment.

Matthew Potts: But it's also puzzling because of the way Jesus finishes, right. He names these dead men, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and say, "To God, they're alive." What does that mean? What does it mean to be alive to God in this way?

Matthew Potts: To understand what Jesus is up to, I think we actually have to look again at this question the Pharisees ask, or at least maybe listen to it in the way that I think Jesus is listening to it. Note how casually these high priests, these men pass this hypothetical woman from brother to brother. This daughter of Abraham passed from brother to brother. They will ask anybody they can find to speculate about who she belongs to, anybody at all, even the wandering rabble rouser, who just came into their temple, and overthrew all the tables, they'll ask him who this woman belongs to. They'll ask anybody. Anybody that is, except the woman.

Matthew Potts: I think this is what Jesus means when he talks about not giving in marriage, not being given in marriage in the resurrection. I think he's actually pointing back at

the Sadducees question, and noting that it presumes that human life, and human being could ever be passed back and forth like a commodity.

Matthew Potts: "You're asking the wrong question." Jesus says. "The answer is actually right in front of you." Jesus says. "You are so caught up, you Sadducees, in the Archaic theological problems of your own privilege that you have failed to recognize the human being, this woman, this daughter of Abraham, who would be, and should be your answer. Who does she belong to? She belongs to God. God is with her. God is for her, and any religion that looks past her for the answers to its questions is asking the wrong question."

Matthew Potts: "If Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob are alive anywhere," Jesus says, "They're alive in her. God is God of the living, not of these dead brothers, nor of the Sadducees' dead questions." No wonder they arrested him.

Matthew Potts: Today, in this church, this Memorial Church, we commemorate the war dead, our war dead, and our benefactors. If God is the God of the living, what does it mean to say that these war dead, these benefactors are alive to God? What does it mean, what would it mean to remember the dead well? How are they alive to God?

Matthew Potts: And I think actually, at least when I attempted an answer, might be in the word benefactor itself. Now I'm not a scholar of Latin. There are probably scholars of Latin in this sanctuary this morning. But the word benefactor comes from the Latin, bene, means good. Factor from facere, which means to make good.

Matthew Potts: Consider the names etched on the wall of this church. How do we make good on the promise of their lives cut short by violence, and more? Consider this Jesus, who was crucified, how do we make good on the promise of his life cut short by violence? What could that even mean, to make good on the promise of these lives, except to pursue among the living, the virtues, and values for which they gave their lives?

Matthew Potts: We remember them well. Not when we recite platitudes about sacrifice, or shout empty slogans about freedom and justice while calling them to mind. We remember them well. We remember them best when we pursue freedom and justice in our own world, in and among the living, whom they have left behind. To commemorate the dead, to have a good memory means to make good on their promise among the living.

Matthew Potts: I'm a veteran. I served in the United States Navy, on a guided missile cruiser in Japan. Japan is the country where my mom was born and raised, during the American occupation, after World War II. It's also where my dad served in the Navy, during the Vietnam conflict.

Matthew Potts: When I was in Japan, in the Navy, I was in charge of a division of about 40 sailors. I'm going to tell you something that might surprise some of you. Of my

40 sailors, about half of them were not US citizens. They were from the Philippine islands, or Granada, or Haiti, or Panama, or other places like Japan, that the United States has invaded or occupied over the last 70 years.

Matthew Potts: And these immigrants enlisted in our US Navy to make good on the promise they saw in this country. In this, they were not unlike so many who have come before them. Immigrants, and the children of immigrants, whose names are etched upon the walls of this church, and whose names are inscribed upon the war memorials all over this land. These immigrants, and these children of immigrants, these war dead, these are the ones whom today we aspire to remember.

Matthew Potts: Meanwhile, in this, our land of the living, we place immigrants, and the children of immigrants in cages, and we literally forget to whom they belong. We lose track of who these children belong to. I would suggest that we know who they belong to. They belong to God.

Matthew Potts: If we would make good on the promise of our war dead, if we would make good on the promise of Jesus, we had better remember that freedom and justice are not just abstractions that accrue to our memories. God is God of the living.

Matthew Potts: Freedom and justice only arise ... And I can't help but interrupt myself here. The word the New Testament translates as resurrection, just means to arise. Freedom and justice only arise in the bodies and lives of real people living in our world, here and now. Not just in our ideas, and not just in our memories. If we Christians would serve the living God, we'd better get to work making good on God's promises to the living.