**A reading from the Gospel of Luke, chapter 20, beginning to read at verse 27.**

**27** Some of the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Jesus with a question.

**28** “Teacher,” they said, “Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother.

**29** Now there were seven brothers. The first one married a woman and died childless. **30** The second **31** and then the third married her, and in the same way the seven died, leaving no children.

**32** Finally, the woman died too.

 **33** Now then, at the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?”

**34** Jesus replied, “The people of this age marry and are given in marriage.

**35** But those who are considered worthy of taking part in the age to come - and in the resurrection from the dead - will neither marry nor be given in marriage,

**36** and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels.

They are God’s children, since they are children of the resurrection.

**37** But in the account of the burning bush, even Moses showed that the dead rise, for he calls the Lord ‘the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’

**38** He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive.”

**39** Some of the teachers of the law responded, “Well said, teacher!” **40** And no one dared to ask him any more questions.

SERMON:

G.K. Chesterton, a great Christian author, once said:

**"When people stop believing in God,**

**they don't believe in nothing ––**

**they believe in anything."**

We see the evidence for it every day in the cults that people follow – in the crazy things that come out of the mass media––in the casual comments that we hear from friends.

"When people stop believing in God,

they don't believe in nothing –

they believe in anything."

I’m reminded of a quotation by  Rick Warren, Who wrote “The Purpose-Driven Church:

**"Some people are so open-minded**

**their brains fall out."**

I was also reminded of an article by Stephen Bates.  He talked about the withering of the old traditions that helped people to deal with death – and new traditions that are creeping in to take their place.

He talked about "theme" funerals designed around things the deceased used to enjoy – golf or bowling or boxing He talked about people being buried with their mobile phones.

"When people stop believing in God,

they don't believe in nothing––

they believe in anything."

There was, however, a touching note in that article.

It mentioned a couple whose two-year-old son died.

The mother said that she could not imagine life without him, but then she said,

**"The traditions that we follow -- maybe will help us survive."**

That was the most "real" thing in the whole article.

Is that what our traditions are all about?

**Do they give us strength and help us to survive?**

A Christian funeral reminds us that death is not the end – that Jesus has gone to prepare a place for us – and that Jesus has promised to come back and take us to himself.

  A Christian funeral gives us hope that we will see our loved ones again.

It helps us to look forward to the day when we will move from an earthly life to a heavenly one.

We might ask the question, “What is Heavon Like”

Before John's death, God gave him a vision of the heavenly kingdom.  We find it portrayed in detail in the book of Revelation.

• John said that heaven is cube-shaped, fifteen hundred miles to a side, and fifteen hundred miles high.

• He talked about walls built of jasper – adorned with jewels.

• He talked about twelve great gates, each carved from a single pearl.

• He talked about streets paved with pure gold – **transparent** gold, clear as glass.

• He talked about the river of the water of life flowing through the city with trees of life lining the riverbanks.

What’s all that about? It seems to be nonsense.

But perhaps we shouldn’t take it too literally.

Perhaps John was seeing a vision of something unlike anything that he had ever seen before and was trying to describe it using the best words that he had.

Imagine trying to describe the colour red to someone who has been blind from birth.

Try as we might, we can't expect to communicate what the colour red means to someone who has never seen colour. John was trying to describe the indescribable.  He had no choice but to use ordinary words to tell us about something that was anything but ordinary."

What John really accomplished was to help us understand that the heavenly kingdom is beautiful – beautiful beyond our ability to imagine.  He succeeded in giving us a glimpse into a world that we are not yet prepared to see or understand.

We get a bit of that in our Gospel lesson today.  The Sadducees – Jesus' enemies – were trying to trap him with a trick question.

To understand their question, we must first understand that when a married but childless man died, Jewish law required his brother to marry the widow and to give her a child by which the dead brother could be remembered.

That might or might not seem like a good law to us, but in a day when widows were helpless and penniless, it served a good purpose.

The Sadducees, who didn't believe in the resurrection of the dead, posed this scenario to Jesus.  A man died, and his brother married the widow.  Then that brother died, and another brother married the widow.  That kept going until seven brothers had married the woman.  Then the woman died.  The Sadducees asked Jesus:

**"Therefore in the resurrection**

**whose wife of them will she be?**

**For the seven had her as a wife".**

The Sadducees were hoping that Jesus, in answering their question, would get himself "wrapped around the axle" – that his answer would give them a chance to ask another trick question – and that they could make Jesus look foolish.

**It sounds like the House of Commons, doesn’t it?**

But Jesus gave an answer they hadn't expected.

His answer gives us a tiny glimpse into heaven.  It wasn't the answer they expected.  Frankly, it is an answer that many people won't welcome.  Jesus said:

**"The children of this age marry and are given in marriage.**

**But those who are considered worthy to attain to that age**

**and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage"**

So Jesus says that in heaven people won't marry.

Some people will welcome that news – but most people won't be so glad.  Happily married people would like to keep a good thing going – and most single people are still hoping.

John had seen a glimpse of something so completely different that he had trouble describing it.  In speaking of pearly gates and streets of gold, he used ordinary words to describe something quite extraordinary.

Something similar might be true of Jesus' comment that there will be no marriage in heaven.  Perhaps Jesus is giving us a tiny glimpse into the heavenly realm – too small a glimpse for us truly to understand.  He told us about something that wouldn't be (marriage), but he didn't tell us what would be.

C.S. Lewis told a story about an artist who was thrown into prison.  Her only light came from a high window, and she couldn't see outside.

This woman gave birth to a son in prison, and as her son grew she tried to explain the outside world to him – wheat fields –mountains – ocean waves breaking on the shore.

The boy couldn't understand, so the woman started doing pencil sketches for him – drawing wheat fields and mountains and ocean waves.  But the boy still didn't understand.  He thought that the outside world was made up of charcoal-grey lines on faded paper, and that didn't seem especially wonderful to him.

That story is a parable.  It tells us that there is something out there beyond our understanding.  Like the wheat fields and mountains and ocean waves, it is beautiful.

Joy awaits us – joy beyond our imagination.  We need not to get caught up in the details, but need only to trust our Heaven Father that he will provide for us in ways too wonderful to imagine.

Let me close with a little story – but first, for the benefit of those who are not needle workers, let me explain.  When people do needlework, they create beautiful designs on cloth by passing thread down and up countless times through the cloth.  The top side of the needlework is almost always beautiful, but the underside is often not beautiful.  The underside will usually be a bit of a mess.  With that background, hear the story:

A little girl was walking with her father on a beautiful, clear night when the stars were shining brightly.  They walked along in silence for some time, enjoying their walk together and the quiet of the night and the beauty of the sky.  But then the girl turned to her father and said:

**"I have been wondering.**

**If the wrong side of heaven is so beautiful,**

**what will the right side be?"**

Isn't that wonderful!  "If the wrong side of heaven is so beautiful, what will the right side be?"  What, indeed?  Beyond our imagination!  But beautiful beyond imagination!

So let's not get too caught up in the details but let us instead trust God – and let us look forward to the wonderful surprises that he has in store for us – surprises beyond our imagination!