

Seven Weddings and a Resurrection

Year C, Proper 27 – Luke 20:27-40

preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, Henderson, November 10, 2013

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

Once upon a time, Barry McNary of Harper's Ferry and Mary McCrary, who lived on the prairie, were married. They looked forward to a life that would be nothing but merry. But on their honeymoon, they went to a wetlands sanctuary and explored a tributary leading to an estuary that unfortunately was unsanitary, and Barry tragically developed dysentery, and died.

Now the custom was that when a man died with no children, his brother took the widow as his wife. The first born son of this union took the deceased man's name, received *his* inheritance, and carried on *his* line of descendants.

So Barry's brother Gary, who worked in a dairy and in his spare time enjoyed topiary, married Mary and their first son would be named Barry. But shortly after the wedding, Gary got into an argument at the seminary and suffered a coronary. The family did not tarry, but Barry and Gary's brother Harry, who was in the military, married Mary. Harry and Mary's sons, when they had them, would be named Barry and Gary. But there was a tragic accident with an actuary, and like Barry and Gary, Harry died with no heirs. So the fourth brother, Jerry, the lapidary, married Mary, and looked forward to raising sons Barry, Gary, and Harry, who would receive the inheritance and carry on the names of Jerry's brothers Barry, Gary, and Harry, but the stress of all this proved to be more than Jerry could carry, and he too wound up at the mortuary.

By now the remaining brothers were becoming rather reactionary. Friends advised Larry not to marry Mary, it was just too scary. But Larry ignored their commentary and like his brothers Barry, Gary, Harry, and Jerry, Larry too married Mary. But he met with an unfortunate accident involving a crazed canary (it escaped from the aviary), and Larry went to be with the older McNary's.

Which left brother number six, Perry, the visionary, to marry Mary. (And incidentally, this was a double wedding with Mary's sister Sherry, who was rather contrary, and her fiancé Kerry, the hairy revolutionary.) but Perry fell off a ferry into Lake Michigan (near Gary, Indiana) and like Barry, Gary, Harry, Jerry, and Larry, Perry died with no heirs.

And so it was left to the seventh and final brother, Terry, to marry Mary. Their union would hopefully produce *sons* Barry, Gary, Harry, Jerry, Larry, and Perry, who would receive the inheritance and carry on the names of *brothers* Barry, Gary, Harry, Jerry, Larry, and Perry who had died. Not to mention any other sons who might come of the union and who would be Terry's heirs. He thought he might name son number seven Elmo, or Fred, or maybe even *Timmy*.

But as he reflected on the daunting task before him, Terry was *overwhelmed*. His cousin Cheri asked how he felt about the coming marriage, and he replied, "Very, very wary." And his fears turned out to be justified, because at the wedding reception he ate a bad berry, and, well, you know what happened next.

Now Barry, Gary, Harry, Jerry, Larry, Perry, and Terry had all been married to Mary, and all had died. The question is, when they all get to heaven, what becomes of Barry, Gary, Harry, Jerry, Larry, Perry, Terry, and Mary? Who will be Mary's husband? *That* is the quairy – I mean query.

What a silly, ridiculous, far-fetched story. And the fellow who first told it (yes, I've added just a *few* embellishments) well, that fellow *intended* his story to come across as silly and far-fetched. His story was as absurd as it was hypothetical – and it was *supposed* to be. The fellow who told the story, you see, was a Saducee who didn't *believe* in the resurrection. He told the story because he knew that this hill-

country prophet, this upstart messiah-wanna-be, this Jesus, from *Nazareth*, for Cephas' sake, was among those Jews that *did* believe in the resurrection. This silly, ridiculous story was *meant* to be silly and ridiculous – and the silly, ridiculous question at the end, well, that was designed to embarrass Jesus, and all of those other hicks with him, with the utter absurdity of the very *idea* of resurrection.

But Jesus isn't embarrassed at all. He takes the silly story and he addresses it head-on. Marriage in the Kingdom of Heaven, Jesus says, is not *about* property rights, and it's *definitely* not about who owns who. Period. So much for the silly story, and the *sillier* question that went with it. But then he goes on to deal with the *real* question: what *is* life like in the resurrection.

Imagine a baby, still in the womb. Assuming that child could understand what we are saying, how could we describe what *this* world is like? How could we describe the blue shimmer of a summer sky, or the *crispness* of a fall day like yesterday? How could we describe fried chicken, or sweet tea, or chocolate cake? How could we describe see-saws, or McDonald's Play Land, or cartoons? How could we describe the feel of your hand around a tree limb as you hang there *just* before you let go, or the feel of spring grass crushing beneath your bare feet when you're running?

How could we describe the magic in your mother's eyes, or the security of your father's hands, or the joyful weight of a friend's arm draped across your shoulder? How could we describe the near loss of self in a first kiss? How could we describe the surprising weightlessness of holding your own newborn child? How could we describe the familiar touch of a spouse grown old together – or even the sweetly aching longing when that touch is gone?

How could we describe friendship? How could we describe loyalty? How could we describe freedom? And here on the day before tomorrow, how could we describe the commitment and courage and honor of men and women who have given it all up to secure these things for *us*?

How can we describe the concrete reality and the profound mystery of this life to anyone who has yet to experience it? Poets and playwrights and philosophers spend their whole *lives* trying to do just that one small task – and every one of them has always fallen short.

How much tougher is it, do you suppose, to describe the life to come to those of us who have yet to experience it? Old Testament prophets tell of kingdoms and angels and an earth-like paradise. In his revelation, John writes of his vision of a city so unique and so marvelous and so overwhelming that the greatest superlatives he can muster are still totally inadequate, where each gate is carved of a single pearl and where even the streets are paved with purest gold. Paul seems to give up on even *trying* to describe the difference between this world and the next, saying that for now we see as if in a dark mirror – and only *then* will we see face to face. Now we know only in part, the Apostle concludes, but then we will fully know, just as God has known *us* all along. What is life in the resurrection like? You'd have to ask someone who's been there.

Once upon a time, a very righteous man was wrongfully and maliciously accused of a capital crime. He was tried, and he was convicted, and the sentence was carried out on a hill just outside town, with *everyone* watching, one dark Friday afternoon. By Sunday morning, *most* had moved on to the busyness of their lives – but a handful of women went to check on the grave. They found the grave, but they didn't find their friend! Most of them ran, but one stayed to pray. When this woman sees her friend risen from the dead, she fails to recognize him – until he calls her by her name. It turns out, you see, that our God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. It turns out, you see, that resurrection isn't hypothetical at all.

It's a silly, ridiculous, far-fetched story, isn't it? The real question is: In the resurrection, who's will *you* be?