

Children of the Resurrection
November 6, 2022
Luke 20:27-38
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Grand Rapids, MI

In the mid-1800s Stanford Bennett and JP Webster were a songwriters who worked together. Like many talented musicians JP Webster was a sensitive soul and suffered from bouts of depression now and then. This caused him to focus on the darker side of life and was, therefore, a troubled soul during those bouts of depression.

Bennett, Webster's friend and fellow musician, was often quick to notice when Webster's mood changed. In one such instance, Webster came to Bennett's place of business walked down to the stove, and turned his back on him without speaking a word. Bennett, who was at his desk, turned to him and asked, "Webster, what is the matter now?" To which Webster replied, "It is no matter, it will be all right by and by." This response stirred in Bennett's heart and he said, "The Sweet By and By! Why wouldn't that make a good hymn?" To which Webster responded, "maybe it would".

Bennett immediately started penning the words as fast as he could. He handed the complete hymn to Webster who immediately lit up and started writing the notes while playing his violin. Within 30 minutes they had produced a new hymn that is a favorite Gospel song still today we know as **In the Sweet By and By**.

**There's a land that is fairer than day,
And by faith we can see it afar;
For the Father waits over the way
To prepare us a dwelling place there.**

**Refrain:
In the sweet by and by,
We shall meet on that beautiful shore;**

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We shall meet on that beautiful shore.**

Today on All-Saints Sunday it is fitting that we consider the land that is fairer than today. The hope of resurrection life that we hold fast to in our faith in Jesus Christ who said in John's Gospel, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die."

In this life we are not promised an easy, carefree life and most of us can find times either past or present that we would call difficult times of the soul. Grief and sorrow, hardship and distress are part of life. Today we are tending to this grief that accompanies us on our journey of life. Here in the protective presence of God we may feel sad, smile at a happy memory or even allow tears to flow again as we say their names, longing to see their faces.

We find comfort in our faith as Jesus reminds us in today's reading from Luke. We worship the God of the living, not the dead. We are children of the Resurrection. But our resurrection is not a mirror of this world. No, it is a transformed world. Transformed by the forgiveness of sin and by the power of God's great love. At place John describes in Revelations, "God will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away."

The Sadducees, the religious leaders in today's Gospel, who raised this topic with Jesus were not seeking the truth but only wanted to discredit Jesus because they felt their power over the people threatened by Jesus' words and acts of liberation. They could not imagine heaven being any different from this flawed and unjust world. They were not concerned about the undue hardship laid upon the unnamed woman in their fictitious argument, only who would continue to control her in the afterlife according to

the law, by asking ‘who will be her husband?’ But Jesus knows that another Kingdom is coming. A new realm that would have no need for marriage, there no hardship and no death. It is this kingdom we pray for when we say, “thy kingdom Come, thy will be done. On earth as it is in heaven”. We pray for a day when hardship and sorrow will be no more. We pray that humankind will experience the fullness of their humanity, free of hardship, tears, and suffering. Where all are treated as the beloved children of God that we are.

We serve the God of the living. A life full of love that is moved by compassion. A life dedicated to caring for “the least of these” as Jesus did. We do not just pray for these things in the sweet by and by. We pray for the establishment of God’s kingdom of love here on earth in the here and now.

The founders of East Church answered God’s call to create a community that wanted to care for the least of these. A community that sought the Common Good of Grand Rapids and beyond. Let us as a congregation recommit to keeping their and our faith alive and reviving the generosity and compassion that built this great community of faith. Let us not live in the nostalgia of days gone by or only dream only of a sweet by and by found upon a far off shore. Let us live the faith of our ancestors in the here and now full of compassion, love and generosity as we carry on seeking to establish God’s kingdom here on earth to the glory of God. For we are the children of the resurrection and the life.

**To our bountiful savior above,
We will offer our tribute of praise
For the glorious gift of God’s love
And the blessings that hallow our days. Amen.**