

“Making Room for Mystery”
Exodus 3:1-6; Luke 20:27-38

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Do you have mystery in your life? Is there a sense of awe, of wonder in your life? Is there a place you go or something you look at and you say, “I don’t know what’s happening right now, but it fills me with awe. It fills me with a sense of mystery.” Maybe when you’re in the woods or listening to beautiful music? Maybe there’s a work of art you admire? Something that takes you out of yourself and connects you to something larger? Whatever it is, I hope there are times when you feel a sense of mystery and awe, a sense of wonder in your life.

We all need it. All human beings need a sense of mystery. There are times to be clear and precise and practical. If I’m having surgery, I want the doctor to be very clear and precise and practical. But we also have times when we need awe and wonder. We need mystery. We need to connect to something outside ourselves.

The Sadducees, sadly, are not big believers in mystery. They want everything clear and precise. And so, they bring Jesus a question about Levirate marriage.

The term *Levirate Marriage* comes from the Latin word for Brother-in-Law. The idea was if a man married, and he died without having any children by his wife, one of the man’s brothers would take the widow as a wife and have children by her. The children would be given the dead man’s name so he would live on. His name would not be forgotten. The woman could depend on someone to care for her and support her.

Nowadays we wouldn’t want that. Kind of gross, actually. But at this time, it was a caring and practical way of assuring the dead man lived on, and the woman had someone to support her. Not ideal in our eyes, no. But it worked for them. And not just for the Jews. Levirate marriage was widely practiced in the Ancient Near East.

But the Sadducees take it to the point of absurdity. And of course, that’s the point. Seven brothers all have the same woman

for a wife. None of them have children by her. In the resurrection whose wife will she be? They're making a point. Resurrection is absurd.

But Jesus shows them they are wrong. They don't understand. There will be a resurrection. God is God of the living, not of the dead. But what the resurrection will look like is not clear. Jesus affirms the fact, the reality of resurrection. But he doesn't give us details. He leaves it a mystery. Jesus leaves the details a mystery.

I think that's part of the strength of this passage. And I think it's something important Christianity offers the world today. We all need mystery, and Christianity has it.

Indulge me a minute and let's look at this poem. Remember, I'm an old English major and old English majors spend a lot of time thinking about old Englishmen. In this case, William Wordsworth.

The World Is Too Much With Us

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;—
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!
This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;
The winds that will be howling at all hours,
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;
For this, for everything, we are out of tune;
It moves us not. Great God! I'd rather be
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn.

by William Wordsworth, 1802

This poem was written in 1802, and yet it speaks to us today. We are this poem. We are this poem. The world is too much with us. Our time is swallowed up. Going here, buying that, we lay waste our powers. We are so consumed with appointments and deals and things we have to do nothing moves us. And yet, we are desperate for something more. Sounds like us? It is us.

But the good news of God, and with God there is always good news, the good news of God is we are not suckled in a creed outworn. We're not staring off into space, hoping for a glimpse of some pagan god. Anything to bring wonder and mystery to our lives, something to please take us out of ourselves.

We don't need that because we are nurtured in a rich, full faith. Our faith is vibrant and alive. Yes, there are times when we need to be clear and precise and exact. The Powerless Need Help! What precise, practical steps are we going to take? Yes. There is a practical side to our faith.

But there is also mystery. There is awe. There is transcendence. The Resurrection. The Trinity. The Sacraments. Our faith offers the gift of mystery, the gift of awe.

Thanks be to God. Amen.