



# WONDER IN ALL

## Life Before Death

a reflection by  
Richard Jones

*My* name has recently been the subject of discussion in a district courthouse in Los Angeles, California; in fact the subject of quite a few discussions on several occasions. Now, LA is a long way removed from the Diocese of Hereford in this very rural and quiet part of England – both in terms of distance and culturally too – but rest assured, I was wholly on the right side of the law! The case being considered concerns the estate of a distant relative; someone whom I never met and whose existence I was only vaguely aware of. It transpires that I am a surprised, but very grateful recipient of a generous gift – a share of the estate of my “late first cousin twice removed”.

Our Gospel account for this Sunday describes an encounter between Jesus and the Sadducees, a particular religious group who did not believe in resurrection. It forms a series of accounts in Luke’s Gospel all of which feature Jesus being questioned by various groups of people, all of whom have a vested interest in wanting to discredit Jesus. You can imagine the plotting and scheming that went on over many hours and days as they devised a question to ask Jesus – this self-proclaimed “Son of God,” who was challenging the status quo and by implication their religious authority and traditions.

The question they ask is long and convoluted and involves a complex series of relationships through marriage. They set up a situation which is so unlikely that it lies on the far edge of possibility, and then they add a further condition which demonstrates the real nature of their question.

Jesus answers by telling the Sadducees that they’re asking the wrong question; a tactic often used by politicians, here as we are in a General Election campaign in the

United Kingdom. Not only is it the wrong question, it’s the wrong kind of question; it’s a sort of ‘nonsense’ question if you like.

So many of the questions asked about generous giving come under the same heading. Should we aim to give 5% or 10% of our income to and through the church? Is that gross or net income? What about other charitable giving? Can I take off other essential payments - mortgage, healthcare payments, and so on?

“God,” said Jesus, “is the God of the living, not the dead.” What matters is not the correctness of our legally worked out positions, but the living relationship which we express through our actions. We shouldn’t attempt to hide behind rules and regulations or the inertia of the status quo.

Our generosity is part of that process of travelling light, of being a pilgrim people on a journey with God, ready to encounter God in new things, at new times, in new ways – generosity which is at the heart of our calling to be disciples in this world, in the here and now. To borrow a strapline from Christian Aid, the international mission agency, Christian faith and generous giving is as much about “Life before death” as it is “Life after death”.

... but I still have no idea what a “first cousin twice removed” actually is!



**Richard Jones is the Parish Giving Adviser within the Diocese of Hereford, Church of England.**

**He has previously served within two dioceses within the Church in Wales; altogether working with matters of generous giving and stewardship for eighteen years.**

**He is passionate about resourcing the mission and ministry of the church, especially the rural church – which is fortunate as he now serves in the most rural diocese within all of the Church of England!**

November 10, 2019

Proper 27  
Luke 20:27-30



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## Reflection Questions

- How would you describe your relationship with God?
- What aspects of everyday life hinder or limit your experience of God’s kingdom in the world today?
- Do you ever feel that you try to out-smart God?!
- Are you open to be both loved and challenged in how God responds to questions and prayers?
- Do you feel that generous giving is part of your pilgrim journey with Jesus?
- Pray for yourself and for your church that together we may all know the joys and richness of “Life before death”.

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