

Here and Now
November 6, 2022
Luke 20:27-38

“Why me?” How many of you out there have ever had this question cross your mind or pass your lips? It’s only two words, five letters long, and yet this is a powerful question, one that is nearly impossible to answer. Many have tried, but few if any have succeeded. The best answer, the best response, I have found to this question and to those situations that have us asking that question comes from Rabbi Harold Kushner, famed author of the book *Why Bad Things Happen to Good People*, a book recounting his own wrestling with his son’s untimely death in a car accident. This is a question I’d bet all Christians ask at some point, and with what we think is a justified reason. Ideally, we follow God’s laws to the best of our abilities, confess our sins when we do something wrong, try to make amends and set things right, and embody the love God gives to us for all the world to know. However, despite our kind words, our loving actions, our humble thoughts, bad things still happen to us. A rodent chews through the wiring in our vehicle, making it inoperable: “Why me?” We’re given a potentially life-altering diagnosis: “Why me?” We waited half an hour in the drive-thru for a McRib only to find out that they’re out of the mystery meat and they can’t sell it to us: “Why me?” Regardless of why we ask it, this is a question we are all guilty of asking, even if in silence and/or unconsciously, and it’s one we unsurprisingly need to stop asking.

“Why me” is debatably one of the most toxic questions any person, Christian or otherwise, can ask. I say that because it’s rooted in an assumption that, so long as we follow the rules, nothing bad will ever happen to us. It’s a question rooted in a sense of self-entitlement, whether conscious or unconscious, saying that, as good people, we deserve to never feel pain or have bad things happen to us. Regardless, this question causes us to lose sight of what glorious things are yet to come, favoring rather to weigh the present moment as more valuable or more important than what God has in store next, of what redemption God will bring out of pain, torment, and even death. Probably most striking, though, asking this question puts our needs and wants over those of others. We ask “Why me” while there are people in far worse situations than us; people who are impoverished, starving, underinsured or uninsured, abused, and persecuted; people like the woman in today’s story who definitely has a greater right to ask that question than us.

The woman in the story just can’t quite seem to catch a break. Her first husband dies and she hasn’t born him a son. Per the law of “Levirate Marriage,” she marries the next oldest of his brothers so that any sons she bears with the second husband might be heirs to the first husband’s estate and carry on that lineage. However, the second brother dies before any sons are born as well. This proceeds to happen five more times, each time marrying the next oldest only to have him die childless. Now, here she is, a woman in a patriarchal society without a man in her life. Her husbands are all dead, and she has no sons to protect her. Her father gave her away in marriage once, and therefore cannot take her back, nor would he, even if he were alive. On top of that, there is no work for women in that time, no way for her to support herself. So, she has no one to support her, no way of supporting herself, and no power or authority simply because she was born a girl. Instead, she is condemned to live the rest of her life as a destitute widow.

She has been dealt one of the ultimate “Why me” situations, it seems. However, despite all of this pain and hardship, Jesus points to a reason for her to have hope: the afterlife.

This question about the woman was asked by the Sadducees not as a means of ruling on who is her legal husband or to better understand the extent of Levirate Marriage, but rather to attempt to point out what they see as the ridiculousness of the concept of the afterlife. They don’t believe in it personally because it’s not in the Law handed down by Moses. In fact, they don’t believe in anything that doesn’t have a basis in Mosaic Law. However, in asking this question, they make the same mistake we make in asking “Why me?” In both cases, there is in essence a denial that there is any other reality besides the present moment; that what presently is is all there is, all there ever will be, and things cannot change. However, the current moment is not the only moment we live, just as this woman’s temporal life is not the only life she or we will live. When she dies and moves on to the afterlife, those things that mattered in life will no longer matter. Those pains she felt in life will be forgotten. The hardships she faced in life won’t mean a thing. Who she is married to in life will serve no purpose in the afterlife because all persons will be one family, all of us brothers and sisters under the same Father, and that relationship is the only one that will matter. Her being childless will not matter because there will no longer be any death for which to prepare, no lineage in need of sustenance. Instead, there will only be “life.” Those things that matter in life, those hardships that are faced in life, all of that will pass away, and a new life unlike anything we can possibly imagine or know replaces it.

So too is this true for us, here and now, when we face hardships and ask “Why me?” Those pains, those challenges, they seem insurmountable in the moment and we find it hard to see past the present moment. However, there is hope. The car that was damaged by rodents can be fixed if not replaced, and life will go on. That McRib you waited over half an hour for and were denied, it will come back next fall; it always comes back, despite what McDonald’s says. The terrible diagnosis or injury we receive, it’s not always as life-altering as we think, and even if it is, it only alters this life, here and now, not the life that is to come. What glories lie ahead for each of us continue to lie ahead of us, regardless of what this life brings. Even still, when we are faced with adversity, we do not face it alone. We have family, friends, fellow congregants who are willing to help bear the weight by our sides, just as we are willing to help them bear their weights. Whether in life or the afterlife, there is hope: hope of better things to come, hope of reprieve, hope that we are able to lift others up as we have been lifted up through Christ. So, when the here and now has you asking “Why me”, I invite you all to answer that question, saying, “I have hope.” To that, let all God’s children say, “Amen and amen.”