

**“A CUT AND PASTE BIBLE = A CUT AND PASTE LIFE”**

**Luke 20:27-38**

**Preached by Dr. Cahill  
Babcock Presbyterian Church  
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Many people can't embrace Christianity because they can't accept the resurrection of Jesus Christ which conflicts with their rational perception of the universe.

Thomas Jefferson comes to mind. One of his lesser known legacies is called The Jefferson Bible. Jefferson took the Bible and what he didn't like he just cut out. At night, alone in the White House, Jefferson would sit at his desk, take out scissors, and cut from the pages of the Bible those passages he wanted to keep and then pasted them into a scrap book.

So, using this simple method Jefferson edited his own "*cut and paste*" bible.

He took the 66 books of the Bible and cut away all the Old Testament and of the New Testament only the four Gospels were left.

But Jefferson was far from finished. Any passages reporting any miracles and healings miraculously disappeared. The stories of Jesus' birth remained but any mention of the virgin birth was aborted. Jefferson included the story of the crucifixion but the resurrection was deleted. So, the very last verse of Jefferson's "*cut and paste*" bible reads:

*"Now in the place where Jesus was crucified there was in the garden a new tomb. There they laid Jesus, rolled the great stone to the door of the sepulchre and departed."*

And that, in Thomas Jefferson's mind, was the end of the story.

So what remains of Jefferson's Jesus is the greatest philosopher who ever lived whose primary contribution to humanity was his teachings. For Jefferson all this talk of incarnation, miracles and resurrection was just that, all talk.

It's a fact that many intelligent, educated people can't embrace the power of the resurrection simply because it doesn't fit into their scientific world view. At the same time, if someone puts serious time and effort seeking the truth but still is unable to believe, I can only have the deepest regard for the honest effort. At least these honest skeptics take Jesus seriously enough to try to understand him.

But isn't that the problem? We try to understand Jesus. But ultimately you can't understand Jesus. All we can do is stand under Jesus and let his truth and grace flow into our hearts and minds.

Unfortunately, some people won't believe. Ever.

Case in point, the Sadducees. Who were the Sadducees? They were the elite priests who owned and operated the temple in Jerusalem. They were rich and powerful, but also isolated from the everyday cares and concerns of ordinary people. They ran a monopoly, only they were permitted to make ritual sacrifices. Since the people were bound to the temple, they were obligated to pay the annual temple tax and make the mandatory yearly pilgrimage. So, the Sadducees were in the driver seat and they weren't about to move over.

That's why they feared Jesus' growing influence. His teachings threatened their authority not to mention their power. But these guys weren't just about keeping power; they were also all about being intellectual snobs. Remember, they were the elites, rich and educated, too sophisticated to even consider the possibility of the resurrection of the dead which they believed was a fairy tale. In fact they didn't even believe in heaven. Sounds odd, religious leaders who didn't believe in life after death, but it's true.

Like Thomas Jefferson they cut and pasted the Hebrew Scriptures down to the first five books of the Bible, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Why only those five books?

Because those five books gave them legitimacy as the official priesthood (starting with Moses' brother Aaron) and also the Law of Moses, which mandated the ritual obligations that could only be performed in their temple. They didn't recognize any other books, especially the prophets who spoke out against corruption and faithlessness in high places, including the temple.

As far as they were concerned, Jesus was just another troublesome prophet. So they had to discredit him, which should've been easy. After all they were brilliant scholars going against a country bumpkin from the hick town of Nazareth. Full of themselves, a small group slithered towards Jesus with one of those, "Can God create a rock so big he can't lift it?" type of questions. Here's what they come up with: After quoting Moses' law that a man had to marry his brother's widow if there are no children they ask, "If a widow buries seven brothers, in the resurrection who keeps her for eternity?"

In a different situation this could be considered a serious question. You might have wondered about this yourself if you or someone you know was widowed then married again. When you get to heaven, who do you end up with? But since the Sadducees didn't believe in any afterlife this was just a snarky trick question.

Naturally Jesus was unimpressed and quickly turned the tables, quoting a scripture from Exodus, one of the five books they recognized. "And the fact that the dead are raised Moses himself showed in the story about the bush when he speaks of the Lord as the God of Abraham...Isaac...and Jacob. Now God is not of the dead, but of the living, for to God all of them are alive." In other words, if there was no life after death and Abraham, Isaac and Jacob just plain ceased to exist God wouldn't have said, "I (present tense) am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob," God would have to have said, "I (past tense) was the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." God's covenant relationship with them still continues in the present tense and will in the future tense. God is the God of the Living and in the resurrection all generations will share in the eternal I AM of God.

Hoisted on their own petard the Sadducees could only mumble, “You have answered well.”

What lessons can we learn from the Sadducees? Let’s start with this: they made God too small, they put God in a box and made him work for them. Another way of putting it, they made God in their own image, and cemented that image in their own cut and paste bible. What’s more they mistakenly believed the quality of your religion and belief system is dependent on scholarship and intellect, so cutting and pasting is allowed.

At the same time we all want to cut and paste verses from the scriptures when we find these verses problematic, because they make us feel uncomfortable and complicate our comfortable faith and practice. But, cutting and pasting a teaching just because it’s troublesome isn’t the solution. Instead God wants us to wrestle with it so we can be convicted by God’s word when it speaks to us especially when we’re facing an ethical dilemma. We can’t pretend a teaching or a command that demands something from us isn’t there.

Of course if you’re willing to accept what I’m saying about this get ready to be troubled because everything we get from the scriptures is counter cultural. That means we have to unlearn a lot of what we’ve absorbed from human society and relearn what it means to enter into the Kingdom of God. That means old habits, ways of thinking as well as old ways of living may need to be set aside so God can present us with new habits and new ways of thinking and living.

For the last few Sundays my sermons have been about discipleship and stewardship being two sides of the same coin. You can’t have one without the other. As disciples we’re called to a life of commitment and sacrifice. As stewards we’re called to a life of sacrifice and commitment. Why? Because commitment and sacrifice are good for you. Show me someone who never keeps commitments or never sacrifices something for the greater good and I’ll show you someone who’s sad and pathetic. But show me someone who keeps commitments and makes sacrifices for the greater good and I’ll show you someone who is well on the way of becoming Christ-like.

It’s true, when you give yourself away your time, your talent and your treasure, you’re committing an act of faith, and people who consistently commit acts of faith have these five things in common:

- 1) They feel gratitude toward God for his blessings.
- 2) They realize their giving is a part of their spiritual relationship with God.
- 3) They feel privileged to give.
- 4) They understand why God asks for an appropriate percentage of their income.
- 5) They enjoy helping people.

Consecration Sunday is one week away. Here’s a question I want you to think and pray about in the next seven days.

“What is God asking me to give  
as a percentage of my income?”

This is a personal spiritual question between you and God.

Some people answer this question by saying, “The Bible says we should give 10% of my income back to the Lord, so that’s what I’ll do.”

Other people say, “I’m not ready to give 10%, but eventually I want to begin tithing. For now I’ll give 4% or 5% or 6%, knowing God will bless my decision and help me grow in my giving one year at a time

The Bible and your own personal experience tell you God is alive and active in our world. God is your Father waiting for you to be embraced in his everlasting arms. God is your Christ, who suffered and died for your Sins. God is your Holy Comforter who surrounds you like the air you breathe, sharing his life with you.

Never settle for a cut and paste God and never settle for a cut and paste life. Instead, look to Jesus, the embodiment of the living God who lives in and through us now and for all eternity, makes you more alive than you ever thought possible so you yourself can bring to Christ our friends and neighbors.