27Some Saducees, those who say there is no resurrection, came to him 28and asked him a question, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies, leaving a wife but no children, the man shall marry the widow and raise up children for his brother. 29Now there were seven brothers; the first married, and died childless;30then the second 31and the third married her, and so in the same way all seven died childless. 32Finally the woman also died. 33In the resurrection, therefore , whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had married her." 34Jesus said to them, "Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage; 35but those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. 36Indeed they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection. 37And the fact that the dead are raised Moses himself showed, in the story about the bush, where he speaks of the Lord as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. 38Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive." Luke 20:27-38 NRSV

In this gospel lesson in final weeks of Lectionary year "C" with Luke's gospel we are taken "back to the future" on the week before Jesus death and resurrection. During that week Jesus in Jerusalem taught in the temple, and those there weren't only interested in Jesus teaching, but also to find a way to get Jesus in trouble with the authorities. This time it was the part of the religious establishment, the "Saducees" party to see whether they could embarrass Jesus. The Saducees were really the "power brokers" in the faith at that time. They were the "old moneyed" class, as well as most them were the priests to serve at the temple. They were the "realists" in terms of their theology. They only accepted the first five books of Moses to have authority, and dismissed the prophets as well as the idea of angels or a resurrection.   As you might guess, their austere faith never gained a large following. Small wonder then, when the temple was destroyed in 70 AD , the work of the Saducees ended and they went out of existence as a branch of Judaism.

If there was a "people's faith", it was that of the Pharisees who accepted the authority of the prophets, angels, and the resurrection of the dead.

The Saducee's question aimed at the practice of a widow marrying her late husband's brother to preserve her late husband's line. Except that each time she marries another brother the brother dies and she remains childless. It almost is a ridiculous scenario. Then they ask the question they think will "stump" Jesus, whose wife in the resurrection will she be?

First Jesus dismisses the whole scenario by proclaiming that resurrection life is different the earthly life. Then Jesus demolishes their whole dismissal of the idea of a resurrection by using one of the books of Moses that they revere to make the case for the resurrection of the dead. He demonstrates that even in their "just the facts" reality based faith there is also an element of promise and hope.

One the things that I felt this encounter was telling me ,is that while reality needs to be acknowledged, it not meant to crush the powerful forces of hope and faith. Some of the greatest stories of Christians and the Christian church come from situations where the reality looked bleak, but it was the role of faith and hope which overrode the reality.

In fact when you think of it Jesus own death and resurrection which bear witness to power of faith and hope in the midst of the bleak reality of the cross.

St. Peter would later to say to a gathering of persecuted Christians, "Blessed be the God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead…"(1 Peter 1:3a).

May God give us the strength to carry that hope with us especially circumstances or "reality" challenges that "living hope".

Pr. John Van Haneghan