

"BUT WAIT! THERE'S MORE!"

Luke 20:27-38

With today also being Veteran's Day, I thought that I would begin by sharing with you a short story I heard about a man who had spent a career in the Air Force. One of his friends suggested that the family play the Air Force theme song at his funeral. His wife vetoed that idea. She said, "At your father's funeral, we are *not* going to play a song that begins, 'Off we go into the wild blue yonder!'"

Arthur Schiff died last year at the age of 66. You may not recognize the name, but I guarantee you've heard his voice. Arthur was a TV pitchman extraordinaire. He sold everything you can think of. He accomplished this in some 2,000 late night commercials. I know you've heard some of his commercials: "Buy now!" he would always say. Then he would describe his product's amazing virtues, then he would use a phrase he coined himself, "But wait! There's more!" Then he would give you one more bonus product to sweeten the deal. And everything sold for just \$19.95.

When Arthur was assigned to sell an uninspired steak knife, he came up with the Japanese sounding name, "Ginsu." Anybody remember the commercials for the Ginsu steak knife? Arthur used an amusing tag line to describe the Ginsus: "In Japan, the hand can be used like a knife," he would say, "But this method doesn't work with a tomato."

Arthur was parodied by a series of late night comics starting with John Belushi's Samurai Warrior on Saturday Night Live. He was also made fun of in a comic strip.

I can't help but wonder if, as Arthur Schiff breathed his dying breath, he didn't hear a voice saying to him, "But wait! Arthur, There's more!"

Some of the Sadducees questioned Jesus. As we tell this story we need to remember that the Sadducees did not believe in life beyond the grave. Still, they posed this question for the Master.

"Teacher," they said, "Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and have children for his brother. Now there were seven brothers. The first one married a woman and died childless. The second and then the third married her, and in the same way the seven died, leaving no children. Finally, the woman died too. Now then, at the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?"

The Sadducees didn't believe in any kind of an afterlife. They believed that this life is all there is. They were trying trick questions on Jesus to see if they could get him to say something that they could use against him.

The Sadducees' approach to this riddle was less than sincere. They weren't interested in what Jesus had to say about eternity. They simply wanted to trip him up. But, Jesus was ready for them.

Jesus replied, "Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage. But 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. Indeed they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection. And 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. Now He is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to Him all of them are alive." (NRSV)

With his answer Jesus was firmly putting Himself into the camp of those who believe in the resurrection. Of course, it would not be long until He was making resurrection a reality by His own return from the grave. "[God] is not the God of the dead," said Jesus, "but of the living, for to him all are alive." When our hearts are heavy with grief at the graveside of a loved one, Jesus is saying to us, "But wait! There's more!"

This is the most important good news that humanity has ever received. Everything else pales in significance. We hear of breakthroughs in the medical community from time to time. News about progress in the war against cancer, and heart disease, and diabetes, and Alzheimer's, etc. And we are grateful. We want to cling on to life. But deep in our hearts we know these are only holding actions. One thing in life remains inevitable: we all shall die. We all shall lose people we love to death. But, the good news of the Gospel says that God does not allow death to have the last word!

I want to tell you about a man named Arthur Stace of Sydney, Australia. Stace earned an unusual nickname during his lifetime--Mr. Eternity.

Stace grew up in desperate circumstances, the son of alcoholics who left him to fend for himself. He rarely went to school, stole to support himself, worked in a variety of criminal businesses, became addicted to alcohol, and lived on the streets. But in 1930, Arthur Stace heard the message of Jesus Christ and turned his life over to his Savior. Inspired by an evangelist's message on eternity, Stace began writing the word "Eternity" wherever he went. He tried to keep his new vocation a secret, writing this important word on the sidewalks and public buildings of Sydney each night.

He believed that God was calling him to remind others to consider their spiritual state. The citizens of Sydney couldn't stop talking about the mysterious man who wrote the word "Eternity" on every public place he could reach. They soon nicknamed him Mr. Eternity. In 1956, a local pastor discovered the identity of Mr. Eternity, and interviewed him for a local newspaper.

Arthur Stace died in 1967, having written the word "Eternity" over half a million surfaces throughout the city of Sydney. In the year 2000, when Sydney hosted the summer Olympics, city officials honored the memory of Arthur Stace by stringing golden lights across the Sydney Harbour Bridge spelling out that one crucial word: Eternity.

Thirty-three years after his death a formerly homeless illiterate man was making his influence felt due to his obsession with one word, eternity.

No one had to tell Arthur Stace, "Wait! There's more!"

Most people fear death. Nothing can be more human. This world is so beautiful. Who would ever want to leave it? And life is so precious. We want to hold onto it as long as we can. No wonder people fear death.

For some of us death represents the great unknown. We read the biblical accounts of the resurrection and we believe or we want to believe, but still there is that hesitancy.

When I was in seminary, I had to go through a six-week summer internship in a hospital. It was called "CPE" or "Clinical Pastoral Education." I had to go around visiting hospital patients and learn how to give pastoral care to them when they were at a serious stage in their life. This was one of the requirements to be completed between the first and second year of seminary. Let me say parenthetically that theological seminary really doesn't teach you much heartfelt, lovey-dovey stuff. It teaches you all heady stuff. It's heavily academic, and it involves a lot of critical thinking.

Seminary is a three-year Master's Degree program that takes place *after* college, so by the time one finishes all of that it takes about another seven years just to thaw out from that experience! Mostly head, and very little heart.

I remember when I went into one patient's room, an elderly woman, and I asked her if I might pray for her. She brightened up and said as long as she could also pray with me. And so we did.

As I heard this woman take her turn at prayer, I heard in her words a simple but joyous faith. A basic trust in the Savior who had died for her and was raised from the dead. Her prayer had such warmth, such trust, such joy.

But at this stage in my life, my intellect was so incredibly charged up that my heart had been allowed to grow cold. While I heard her pray about her belief in eternity, my mind was asking all of the intellectual “Yes, buts” and “What ifs.” She was being faithful while I was too busy being analytical. Sad but true. I think that God heard her prayer, but probably ignored mine!

Truthfully, though many of us are like that. Eternity is a concept, but not a reality. We might give assent to it with our intellects, but fear it in our hearts.

I wish Arthur Schiff, the TV pitchman could come back to us this morning and testify, "But wait! There's more."

Of course, we do have someone who has been to the other side and returned to tell us that he has prepared for us a place in his Father's house of many mansions. "[God] is not the God of the dead," said Jesus, "but of the living, for to him all are alive."

Sermon title and most illustrations borrowed from King Duncan