

“Questions”

Job 38: 1-7; Mark 4: 35-41

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Questions are important for growth. A good question already shows an understanding. Questions come out of seeking greater understanding. Questions also come out of doubt about our faith, but doubt is not the opposite of faith. Doubt is actually a part of faith because faith is a commitment and a decision about things which cannot be proven in a measurable way. Certainty on the other hand is being able to prove something. Being certain is actually not faith. Doubt is an integral part of faith.

Job 38 is full of questions. God is asking Job a number of questions.

“Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth (Job 38: 4b)?” God is asking Job if Job understands why God made the earth. The question goes way beyond Job’s ability to answer.

Job was an amazing follower of God. Job was faithful to God. Job’s life was awesome. He was wealthy and had a great family. Job loved and worshipped God! Life then goes south. Job’s children die. Thieves steal his animals and his business. Job also loses his health. Then he asks why these things are happening to him. Job’s friend visited and told him he was the cause of his pain and suffering. Job strongly disagreed with his friends, and stood by God. Job did not understand his suffering and questioned God.

Limitations of human perspective: Job was unable to understand everything in the world, because he was looking from his limited human perspective, not from God’s perspective. When we see God face to face, then we will see much more clearly. It is important to keep in perspective that we actually live in the sphere of faith and doubt and not certainty.

Jesus brings order out of chaos. When we look at the context of the story of Jesus calming the storm, the people at the time understood through the scriptures that the sea stood for both chaos and for disasters which one can experience in life. What Jesus did in saving the disciples in the storm, was not only saving them for the moment, the greater significance was Jesus commanding order over chaos. Jesus was so not much more than the disciples thought he was. He was God.

“Who then is this, that the wind and the waves obey him (Mark 4: 41b)?” There are a number of questions in this passage. First of all the disciples knew the lake like the back of their hands, so what was happening must have been way beyond the range of what they had previously experienced. How could Jesus have stayed asleep? This series of events brought them to the big question, “Who then is this, that the wind and the waves obey him?”

The questions from God to Job and the disciples’ questions do not need an answer necessarily, but they help us to contemplate and allow the Holy Spirit to give us deep meaning. “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing? Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?”

Questions are to be encouraged. I remember when my children were growing, they would ask so many questions. They were finding out about their world. This is how you learn and grow. Naturally we do lose some of that child-like curiosity as we get older. However, it is important for us to continue to be curious about our faith and to encourage congregants of all ages to be free to ask questions. Too often in our church history the church had not been keen on questions. Since doubt is integral to Faith (because faith is not certainty) it is important to encourage questions even though sometimes they can be unsettling. For example, one might ask the question, “Why does God allow injustice, famine and so much poverty in the world?” This question then will lead to another question which comes back to us from God: “Why are you allowing injustice, famine and poverty in the world?”

Friends, we are not just told to live with the questions – it does not stop there! God does not leave us alone. Just like the disciples in the boat, through the Holy Spirit, we have the living Christ to reassure us, to support us to give us encouragement and to save us. When we share communion, Christ is present through the Holy Spirit. We have the living Christ with us. We do not see Christ, or can prove he is there. Christ knows faith is not certainty, and that is why he gave the meal to make invisible Grace (that we cannot see) into visible Grace through the everyday elements of bread and wine. Christ himself is alongside us, entering into our hearts to build that deep knowing of his loving presence.

The question of suffering and joy: Holding the tension of the two (suffering and Joy) is essential in seeing the way forward. We see suffering around us, and we also see joy around us. With God’s presence, we can hold the mystery of the reality of the two together (The following is an excerpt from a recent devotional by Theologian Richard Rohr).

“In July 1942, the same month that the Nazis began their first big street roundups of Jews in Amsterdam, Etty Hillesum wrote in her diary, “I am with the hungry, with the ill-treated and the dying, every day, but I am also with the jasmine and with that piece of sky beyond my window; . . . It is a question of living life from minute to minute and taking suffering into the bargain. And it is certainly no small bargain these days.” [3] Etty was looking at suffering straight in the face. Her friends, her family, and she herself were under the sentence of extermination. It was now beginning to be carried out. And yet Etty held within herself the “handsome mixture” of pain at the plight of her people, and of what one people can do to another people, along with a continued delight in the gift of life and its ineffable wonder. “I have looked our destruction, our miserable end, which has already begun in so many small ways in our daily life, straight in the eye . . .” she writes, “and my love of life has not been diminished.” [4] To look life straight in the eye, to see its pain and to see its beauty—this is an essential part of glimpsing the way forward.”