

Living the Questions Easter 3 - 18th April 2010

Reading:

John 21: 1-19

The other day, a parishioner told me of how one of her grandchildren had asked her an intriguing question. - "If God made everything, who made God?" What a wonderful question! Young minds stripped of sophistication see the world, and can ask questions that go to the heart of life's deepest issues. But we shouldn't be too surprised, for human beings are born questioners. Our toddlers have no sooner strung a few words together and the questions start to flow. Why? What's that? And as they grow it's not that long before they have mastered the "Are we there yet?" question. And as speech develops the questions become more probing and specific. Why does that man smell? How do babies get inside their mummy's tummy? Why do people fight? Why do we have to die? And where's heaven? But all too soon we socialize our children out of asking questions - especially the ones that matter. In fact it's what we all learn to do. Let's not ask questions because it'll make me look stupid, and we don't want to rock the boat. So great is the fear we prefer to stay with our ignorance.

But not so with Jesus. The gospels record that Jesus starts and ends his ministry with questions. His first recorded words are questions to his anxious mother, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my father's house?" And then there is his last anguished cry from the Cross - "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?"

In life Jesus had the habit of asking direct probing questions: Whom do you seek? What do you want? What do you want me to do for you? How many loaves have you? Who do people say I am? Why are you sleeping? What is truth?

It's no wonder that Jesus said we had to be like little children if we were to enter the kingdom. Children who ask lots of questions.

Jesus was relentless in seeking the truth, and asking questions is always the place to start. Jesus sees a world far from perfect and he asks questions. He observes the abuse of religious and civic power and he challenges it by asking questions. He places himself with the poor, the chronically ill, the outcast of his society and his very presence ask the question - Why? And his questions lead him to the cross. But sadly in our sophisticated world we have learned to be a little afraid of questions. Above all else we seek answers, easy answers so that we may remain secure. And our faith paradoxically becomes a certainty based on easy answers to facile questions.

But the great 20th Century Swiss theologian Karl Barth makes the observation that every person entering a worship service comes asking a single question consciously or unconsciously, "Is it true? Is it true about God?" And he goes on to say that if the clergy and church members are unaware of this question, or stifle its utterance aloud, then how can the church minister to the ones brave enough to ask the question? If Barth is right and in my experience I believe he is, we need to build a community here at Pilgrim where questions are honored and accepted in love. For it is in our questions that we come closer God and to each other.

Today in our baptismal liturgy, we asked questions of Fiona and Marcus, questions that go to the heart of what it means to be a child of God. And I have to say that those same questions were asked in preparing for William's baptism and in the process led to a great deal of healthy discussion. There were no facile answers. That's why today they answered:

"With God's help we will."

But the one constant answer that came out of our pre-baptism questions was that William, Marcus and Fiona will live out the questions. In matters of the spirit we are called to live out our faith. To live with our questions.

That's why in our gospel reading Jesus asked Peter the question, "Do you love me?" not once but three times. Sure, we can simply say that the three questions mirrored the three denials of Peter before the Cross, but that I believe is too facile an answer. Jesus asks Peter the question "Do you love me?", and he asks us that same question because he believes that it is a question that needs to be posed over and over again, it's a question that needs to be lived. Love can only be lived out.

Jesus' question is a challenge - a challenge to ministry. Do we love Jesus? Do we love Jesus? Do we love Jesus? Then what are we going to do about it. What does it mean to feed lambs and tend sheep in the 21st Century?

Perhaps we can live out some questions. Questions like why is that we can live in comparative comfort whilst 2/3 of the world's people live from hand to mouth? Why do we continue to believe that violence is the way to solve arguments? Or why do we think we can lock ourselves away from the world's homeless and refugee people? Questions, questions, questions. But that's the story of Jesus' ministry. Jesus asks, "do you love me?" If your answer like Peter is "You know I do!" then perhaps we should start living as if we do by living the questions.

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18th April 2010
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