

A sermon preached at Zion, North Branford
August 19, 2018
Texts: 1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14, John 6:51- 58
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Many of us were taught in school that our ultimate goal was to have the right answers; to pass the test, to graduate, and by implication: to be ready for adult life. And while it is true that knowledge comes from pursuing the answers, wisdom often comes from pondering the questions themselves. In his Letters to a Young Poet, Rainer Maria Rilke famously gave the advice, "Try to love the questions themselves, live the questions now."

The rabbi Jesus came from the tradition that encourages spiritual growth through questions. In his teaching and his ministry of healing, Jesus often used questions to foster a deeper exploration of needs, desires, and motivations. What do you want me to do for you?ⁱ What do you seek?ⁱⁱ Why were you looking for me?ⁱⁱⁱ These questions of Jesus can be heard as an echo of the questions that God asked.

The bible is full of hundreds of questions asked by God. Where are you? God asked Adam.^{iv} What have you done? God asked Cain.^v What are you doing here? Was asked of Elijah.^{vi} All of these are great questions, to be pondered not just by our spiritual ancestors, but by each of us who desire to be in dialogue and relationship with God.

In our Old Testament reading today, a young Solomon, just made king after his father David's death offers sacrifice and incense to God as was the custom of his time. That night God appeared to Solomon in a dream and said, "Ask what I should give you."^{vii} What do you want me to do for you? Solomon famously asked for wisdom; for the ability to discern good from evil and the understanding he needed to govern God's people.

What do you want me to do for you? If God were to ask you this today, how would you respond? Of course there are no right or wrong answers, but the process of pondering the question can be revealing. I asked, how would you answer today, because our circumstances change. And our circumstances can determine our most pressing desires.

All of us have basic needs we must satisfy: Physical needs- for food and shelter. We need to be safe, to be loved, etc. These were identified by social scientist Abraham Maslow in his famous hierarchy of needs. Maslow proposed that it is necessary to have one's survival needs satisfied first. In order for a person to grow and be able to reach out beyond themselves; although how much is needed to be satisfied is yet another question.

I have witnessed people with very little asking that others be given more at the Loaves and Fishes food line in New Haven. And senior warden Lisa Latham shared at vestry last week that a person in line at Chapel on the Green told her, I had some breakfast today, give the lunches to others first, I'll take one if there are any left over.

Some people feel conflicted about their needs and desires. They equate being in need as being weak and desiring more or something different as being greedy or ungrateful. But God uses our desires to affect God's desires in the world. Exploring our hopes and dreams can uncover what God has planted deep in our hearts. Exploring our feelings about our desires can reveal our truest selves. What is it that we are really hungry for? Are we accepting substitutes? Are we trying to fill ourselves with things that don't really satisfy us? Are we can

hungry for mercy and justice? Do we long for healing? -For ourselves, for those we love, for the society we see that has become broken and dis-eased? Are we hungry for God's kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven? Are we hungry for Jesus?

Jesus tells his disciples that he is the food and drink that will satisfy our deepest desires. He invites us to take his life into our own- so that his life will be in us and ours will be in him. That his very body and blood will become part of us, grow in us, and bring us eternal life; the life of Christ which can bring healing and wholeness to all of creation.

Jesus' words may stir in us even more questions than answers. His words point to a mystery that is beyond our understanding, to the wisdom of God that needs to be taken in, chewed on, absorbed and mulled over. The questions of God, whether they come to us through scripture or like Solomon-in our dreams, or in the midst of our daily trials and interactions -deserve our close attention. What has God planted in us that these questions want to reveal? Hear again the questions of Jesus; What do you want me to do for you? What do you seek? Why were you looking for me?

Jesus, the mystery of God, is both question and answer. Jesus offers himself to us continually, as food and drink, to satisfy our deepest longings.

Because we may be reluctant to open ourselves to God's dreams and Jesus' questions, I will close with this prayer from Sir Francis Drake on the occasion of his circumnavigation of the globe.

Disturb us, Lord, when
We are too pleased with ourselves,
When our dreams have come true
Because we dreamed too little,
When we arrived safely
Because we sailed too close to the shore.

Disturb us, Lord, when
With the abundance of things we possess
We have lost our thirst
For the waters of life;
Having fallen in love with life,
We have ceased to dream of eternity
And in our efforts to build a new earth,
We have allowed our vision
Of the new Heaven to dim.

Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly,
To venture on wilder seas
Where storms will show Your mastery;
Where losing sight of land,
We shall find the stars.

We ask you to push back
The horizons of our hopes;
And to push back the future
In strength, courage, hope, and love.

This we ask in the name of our Captain,
Who is Jesus Christ.

Amen

ⁱ Mark 10:51

ⁱⁱ John 1:35-38

ⁱⁱⁱ Luke 2:49

^{iv} Genesis 3:9

^v Genesis 4:10

^{vi} 1 Kings 19:13

^{vii} 1 Kings 3:5