

That's A Good Question

Luke 20:27-38

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The people of God have always had questions.

As a kid I wondered about all the kid questions: How did Jonah survive in the belly of a fish? How did all of those animals fit onto an ark? If God has all power and loves us, why do bad things happen to good people?

As I grew older my questions got more theoretical. I was curious about how many angels could dance on the head of a pin. I wondered if, even, there was a God. I wondered if God loved non-Christians? If God has all power and loves us, why do bad things happen to good people?

I've always loved how the questions of faith always lead to deeper questions, and the questions always lead to deeper faith. I don't mean to equate questions with doubt, but I take great delight and comfort in Frederick Buechner's idea that "doubts are the ants in the pants of faith. They keep it awake and moving."

People of faith have always had questions of faith.

In Luke's Gospel, the Sadducees have a tough question, maybe even a trick question, for Jesus. In fact, they might be poking fun at the idea of the resurrection, a doctrine that not all of them believed in. At least one marriage custom of Jesus' day (the Levirate custom) required a brother to take the wife of his brother should he die. So, if a woman's husband dies, she becomes the wife (and the property) of her dead husband's brother. She is "passed down" to her husband's brothers until he runs out of brothers. (According to Jeff and Kristi Boyd, our mission co-workers in the Congo, that custom is still operative among some African tribes, and widowed women are vulnerable.)

The Sadducees' question is this: When that woman dies, who is her husband in the time of resurrection? What if she's been "passed down" seven times? That's an interesting, possibly good question.

People of faith have always asked good questions. What are your questions of faith?

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Jesus answers the Sadducees by telling them that at the time of resurrection, women will have no need to rely on a "husband" for care or protection, because in that time of resurrection, all care and all protection will come from God and God's care will be ample. In the time of resurrection, you don't need to worry about protective relationships like marriage; God is the protector. In heaven, customs like Levirate marriage designed to keep women and children safe are not necessary.

Further, at the time of resurrection, people will be concerned with higher things. This is how Eugene Peterson puts it: *Those who are included in the resurrection of the dead will no longer be concerned with marriage nor, of course, with death. They will have better things to think about, if you can believe it. All ecstasies and intimacies then will be with God.*

The Sadducees had an interesting question. And even if they meant to embarrass Jesus or to make him look bad in a crowd by asking a ludicrous question, they did not succeed. Jesus, on the other hand, takes them seriously, regardless of their intention; he uses the opportunity to teach them that while what happens

after death is a mystery to us it is not a mystery to God. God knows what God is doing. So, we don't need to worry.

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We can trust God with our questions. And our questions of faith need not stop our faith. Take Mary for example.

Mary had a big question. When the angel Gabriel came and announced that she had found favor with God and that she was going to bear God's son into the world, her big question was how? How can this be? I suspect she never fully got a satisfactory answer to that question, yet the question didn't keep her from agreeing to a plan she didn't fully understand. (*Hymn 101 No Wind at the Window, v 4, John Bell*)

No payment was promised, no promises made
No wedding was dated, no blue print displayed
Yet Mary, consenting to what none could guess
Replied with conviction, "tell God I say yes."

Mary, thank God, stepped out in faith despite the fact that she had questions of faith. I wouldn't have had the strength to do it, but Mary did.

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Lots of questions. What is heaven going to be like? How many angels can dance on the head of pin (and who cares)? Is it ever okay to tell a white lie? What does tough love look like? Was Reinhold Niebuhr right: there is an equality of sin and an inequality of guilt? Are there consequences to our sin beyond this life? How does God want us to handle the problems of immigration? Why do "good Christians" often disagree about matters of politics, and theology, and science? Why do bad things happen to good people? If you our body is a temple of God, are we allowed to eat Twinkies? When Jesus said we are to sell our possessions, give them to the poor, and follow him, what did he mean and was he talking to me or somebody else? Can I love my neighbor when my neighbor is an Indiana basketball fan?

Questions, questions, questions. Some are interesting or simply theoretical. Some questions keep us up at night: Does God really love me, all the time? Me? After I've said what I said and have done what I've done? Is God with me, truly, always—or am I what I often feel: all alone? Some questions are practical: How am I to use my wealth to love the world? Where is the line that divides self-care with selfishness?

The questions of faith seem always to lead us to deeper questions of faith. And it seems to me the questions always point to God: while we may not always understand (nor are we meant to always understand) the mysteries God, God always understands us.

Having questions of faith is not a sign of weakness or faithlessness. It means we're alive.

Asking questions about faith doesn't mean we are weak. It means we are using the brains God gave us to use. It means we are interested in getting better to know this God who invites us to ask questions in the first place. (Have you read the Psalms, lately?)

The God who made us, redeemed us, and sustains us, always welcomes our questions, our doubts, our wonder, and our awe.

I'm so glad.

AMEN