

Sermon for Sunday, September 23, 2018 - "Ask Questions!"

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 23, 2018
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Decorah, Iowa
Rev. Amy Zalk Larson

[Click here to read scripture passages for the day.](#)

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

"[The disciples] did not understand what Jesus was saying but were afraid to ask him." Why? Jesus was their teacher. He was always asking questions; surely, he'd welcome theirs. Why didn't they just ask?

Rather than seeking understanding, they started arguing about who was the greatest.

Those two parts of their story might seem disconnected. First, they didn't get what Jesus was saying; then later, they started arguing. But I imagine one thing led to the other.

Think about how vulnerable we feel when we don't understand something. It's really uncomfortable. We don't want to be seen as uninformed, confused, clueless. So, we remain silent. Or, we try to make ourselves look good and, maybe even, tear other people down.

I imagine that's what happened with the disciples. They didn't get what Jesus was saying, felt vulnerable and didn't like it. So, they started squabbling and posturing and positioning themselves.

They'd fit right in with 21st century talk radio and cable news channels. They'd find themselves right at home in so many of our conversations.

With all the challenges facing our world today, we so often feel driven to prove ourselves and our arguments, to defend ourselves and attack others. We stand our ground, draw lines in the sand and demonize those on the other side. Or, we just want to put our heads in the sand and hide from it all.

Yet, Jesus calls us to enter into the unknown and uncertainty, into struggle and suffering. He calls us to welcome and listen to those on the margins - like the vulnerable child he took into arms. Those on the margins more naturally question how things work and why. And, it seems Jesus wants us to learn from them.

Sometimes we act as if following Jesus is all about finding assurance and answers; but actually, it is an invitation into a life of vulnerability and searching. We are called to wrestle with our faith so that it will grow stronger. We're called to ask hard questions about the way things are so that we can help bring about God's justice and righteousness. We're called to seek and wonder.

There is good reason to stand together and say what we believe, using the ancient creeds. But, I often wonder if it would also be good to stand and share our questions together:

We wonder about the world.

How is God at work in it?
How can we better care for it?

We wonder about Jesus.
What do the stories of his life, death and resurrection mean for our lives, for the life of the world?
How can we more fully follow him?

We do get to do some searching and seeking together when we pray the Psalms in worship.

The Psalms are full of questions and laments and wonder.
Why do you tarry Lord?
Why do the innocent suffer while the wicked prosper?
Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me?
What are humans that you are mindful of us, O God?

The Psalms help us to honor and pray our questions. The Psalms are just a few of these gifts we are given as Jesus leads us on this journey into the unknown.

Jesus also assures us that we are God's beloved children and so free to ask hard questions of God. We don't have to try to be pious and upbeat all the time; we can join in the laments and soul searching that we find in the Psalms and throughout scripture.

Jesus also gives us companions on this journey of seeking and searching.

Here at Good Shepherd, you can find these companions in lots of ways. The twice-monthly Pew to Pulpit gatherings are all focused around the questions that arise for people during worship. Pew to Pulpit is on a September hiatus; but it will be back in October and I encourage you to check it out. The conversations there are so powerful. People share deep struggles and doubts as well as laughter and musings.

Our Youth Forum participants and Confirmation students also ask really great questions. Last week in confirmation it was so exciting to see them wrestling with the two different creation stories and how evolution fits into it all. If you want to learn from great question askers, come and be a part of Youth Forum or Confirmation Class.

We also tackle big topics at Adult Forum and the Thursday morning Bible Study. This week at Bible Study we asked, "how can we keep praying when it feels like God doesn't answer." We shared our struggles and what we've learned along the way.

Our Social Justice Subcommittee helps us to consider hard questions about why things are so unjust and what following Jesus asks of us. It helps us to hear the stories of those who are on the margins, those who show us what Jesus is like. As we welcome these vulnerable people, we welcome Jesus.

All the committees and Council ask how can we most fully live out our mission? Those who serve in other ways are always considering how and why we do what we do together.

I give thanks for all the questions we ask together here at Good Shepherd. I pray that they help us to follow Jesus out in the world as vulnerable, open seekers. The world needs us to do this.

The challenges we face these days require curiosity and humility. We need to be asking better questions of each other and of God. As we gather together here, Jesus gives us what we need to question, seek, wonder and follow him on the way.

Let's take a moment for silent prayer and then I'll end our time with a prayer by Macrina Wiederkehr:

"It seems to me Lord
That we search much too desperately for answers,
When a good question holds as much grace as an answer.
Jesus, you are the Great Questioner.
Keep our questions alive,
That we may always be seekers rather than settlers.
Guard us well from the sin of settling in
With our answers hugged to our breasts.
Make of us a wondering, far-sighted, questioning, restless people
And give us the feet of pilgrims on this journey unfinished. Amen."

