

Lakewood UMC
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“Unanswered Questions”

August 5, 2007

Psalm 8 (743)

Luke 10:25-28

Someone once asked a rabbi: “Why is it that rabbis always answer a question with another question?” The rabbi replied:

“So what’s wrong with a question?”

Jesus was typical of the rabbis of his day.

He rarely gave a straight answer to a question.

Instead, he responded with another question, or he told a story.

Instead of giving easy answers to complicated questions,

Jesus put his listeners in the position of having to think for themselves.

Today’s lesson from Luke is a good example.

A religious scholar asks a question not for his own edification, but in order to test Jesus: “What do I need to do to get eternal life?”

Jesus answers his question with a question:

“What is written in God’s law? How do you interpret it?”

He wanted people to have to work at understanding God and themselves.

You could never accuse Jesus of oversimplification.

Jesus understood that religion could not be framed in terms of good and evil; black and white. The world is far more complicated than that. Jesus wanted people to think, and he was unafraid of the most challenging and perplexing of questions.

That spirit of openness to inquiry and new truth is continued in the United Methodist church to this day.

While we know absolutely that God exists and Jesus was God in the flesh, we believe that it is important to embrace the questions, knowing that there is grace in the search for meaning, a sacredness about the journey itself.

We believe God continues to reveal new truth through a variety of sources, including science, technology, and medicine. All things can shed new light upon the reality of the living God and the wonder of this mysterious universe.

God has not spoken once and for all—God is speaking to us all the time!

God can work in and through all things to open our eyes, minds, and hearts. It only becomes problematic when we stop asking questions, when we assume we have all the answers, unlimited accessibility, and total power.

How many of you have seen Google Earth? It is amazing.

It brings the world right to your fingertips. I recently typed in my home address and watched in fascination as an eye in the sky zoomed down toward the United States, Colorado, Lakewood, and then Cody Street and our parsonage.

I couldn't see the weeds in the garden, but the image was incredibly sharp. Voyeuristically, I scrolled left and right, east and west, and north and south, to peer into the back- yards of my neighbors. I might be spying on you next time.

Google is now touting "Street View" which captures street scenes in selected neighborhoods around the country, including Denver, San Francisco, San Jose, Miami, New York, Las Vegas and elsewhere. You can see individuals walking down the street in those cities!

One newspaper describes this development as putting the "oogle in Google." Google says that "Street View" is helpful for those who may want to visit these areas in the future, or for those who want to revisit them.

But others say that there are some serious privacy issues involved here.

Google is not the first to do this. Amazon.com had a service called A9.com. Microsoft had street level pictures for maps in Seattle and San Francisco.

This has led to a strong sense of human Omnipotence.

Technology has given us the false notion that we really can do anything we want to do. We can see anything we want to see, when we want to see it.

Nielsen Media Research released a study in June of how Americans watch television. It showed that about 17% of Americans now have Digital Video Recorder technology in their homes and most of them enjoy time-shifting their viewing habits. Of those who have DVR, the overwhelming percentage do not watch their favorite shows in the hour in which they were broadcast. We push buttons, we time-shift, we use keystrokes and mouse clicks, we Google earth and our neighborhoods. This is who we are, seemingly omnipotent.

It is also tempting to believe that we are omniscient, as well.

When I was in college, I had to use a library for research. Imagine—card catalogs!
 Now search engines using web-crawling, retrieval technologies can return tens of
 thousands of responses to a single query in less than a second.

Moreover, this knowledge is available worldwide.

And what we're able to do with biomedical technology is breathtaking.

It is all wonderful, but gives us a false sense of the mastery of knowledge.

Then there is omnipresence. With satellites in the sky and new programs like
 "Street View," being everywhere isn't something just for God.

We can be everywhere and anywhere at almost anytime.

This is not all bad. It can be wonderful, and has made the world a far more
 interesting place. But it also means that it is now easier than ever to dismiss God as
 unnecessary if we feel omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent.

Indeed, God's disappearing act is something we've hardly noticed.

This hasn't happened overnight. Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, religious men
 themselves, discovered things that led to the worship of Reason during the
 Enlightenment. Now, you could almost make a case that the Enlightenment and
 Age of Reason were the good old days.

We live in a world where reason, science and technology are now worshiped for
 themselves. A world in which God has become utterly irrelevant to many.

A world in which we have all the answers to any question imaginable,
 and the mysterious and the holy are not that important anymore.

No wonder then, that atheists and agnostics feel empowered.

And they're writing about it more than ever before.

Consider, for example, [The God Delusion](#) by Oxford professor Richard Dawkins.
 He argues that belief in God is pathological, a willfully held false belief in the face
 of overwhelming evidence to the contrary. He cites Robert Pirsig's idea that

"...when one person suffers from a delusion, it is called insanity.

When many people suffer from a delusion, it is called religion."

Even more controversial are a couple of books by Sam Harris.

He's the author of The End of Faith, and more recently, Letter to a Christian Nation, which was written in response to the notes he received from Christians following the publication of his first book.

We do have more power, knowledge and access than ever before, which can lead to the assumption that we are omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent.

It can lead to the illusion that we do not need God.

Yet ultimately there are things we will never know, realities we will never understand, mysteries we cannot comprehend.

God is still God, and we do need God, whether we realize it or not.

Some people only realize their need for God when their reality is profoundly shaken,

or when they are forced to come face to face with the certainty of death.

All of our wonderful and positive advancements in science, knowledge and technology cannot bring us forgiveness, redemption, peace of mind.

There will always remain things far beyond our limited consciousness, beyond our ability to control, study, analyze and understand.

We will still have mysterious yearnings and a hunger for meaning beyond what we can see and touch and analyze.

We still need the assurance that this is not all there is, that there is a meaning and purpose that will outlast our physical lives on earth. Even highly respected physicists would agree. Writes physicist Paul Davies in

The Cosmic Blueprint:

“The very fact that the universe is creative, and that the laws [of physics] have permitted complex structures to emerge and develop to the point of consciousness — in other words, that the universe has organized its own self-awareness — is far more powerful evidence that there is ‘something going on’ behind it all.

The impression of design in the universe is overwhelming. Science may explain all the processes whereby the universe evolves its own destiny, but that still leaves room for there to be a meaning and higher intelligence behind existence.”

That is what the faith journey is all about, the quest for meaning behind existence,

the sense that there is a divine power, intelligence, and force in this universe,
the belief that some questions do not have human answers.

Albert Einstein said:

“The fairest thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion which stands at the cradle of true art and true science. One who knows it not, who can no longer feel amazement, is as good as dead, a snuffed-out candle.”

Human beings have made stunning advancements in modern times,
contributing significantly to all fields of knowledge and the quality of life.
We have been able to make the world a more humane, compassionate and
connected place.

But ultimately, there will always be things we do not understand,
mysteries we cannot comprehend.

Therefore, it was appropriate for Jesus to answer questions with a question.
He was wise to make people think for themselves, instead of offering simplistic
answers that would ultimately be unsatisfying.

More than anybody else, Jesus knew that God’s ways are not our ways.
He also knew that the search for God is what human life on earth is all about.

The search for God is subtle, and it is different for everyone,
but perhaps it is this search, more than anything else, that makes us human.

We are the thinking part of this vast and intimidating universe,
and our quest for God could well be the purpose of it all.

Embrace the mystery of this life, and there you will find God.

Won’t you join me in reading the words of Psalm 8:

“O God, our God, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Your glory is chanted above the heavens by the mouth of babes and infants.

You have set up a defense against your foes, to still the enemy and avenger.

When I look at the heavens, the works of your fingers, the moon and the stars that
you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
and mortals that you care for them?”

