

QUESTIONS ASKED BY OUR RISEN LORD

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Jesus of Nazareth is the searcher of our hearts. Still today his questions probe our lives through his ministry prior to his crucifixion. Time after time he asked his own critical questions.

One time they said to them when they were in the middle of a violent storm, Why are you afraid? His question comes bounding over the centuries to each one who follows him today, who finds himself in a storm where there is no way out of a holocaust. Why are you afraid? Do you not know I am with you?

On another occasion in his ministry Jesus says to his disciples after he had been with them two years. He had come to the moment, the turning point where they must now confess him. Who do you say that I am? That question today as we respond to it has all the same importance from the time it fell from Christ's lips.

On another occasion Jesus says to his disciples What shall it profit a person if he gains the whole world and loses his own life? His questions then and his questions now cause us to search the depths of our beings. To feel out the response we make to him.

If it is true that before his crucifixion and resurrection he asked questions it is also true that after his resurrection he came the same questioning Christ.

This past week I have had the joyful opportunity to go through the gospels, to read again the accounts of Christ's resurrection from the dead. And to especially search out the questions that are on Christ's lips and heart as he ministers to his own. It has been a striking experience for me to realize that the questions which he asked after his resurrection are pointedly for me and for you as well. They easily divide into some major areas of concern that are on the Lord's heart.

The first kinds of questions, which he asks, are questions, which invite us to discover the truth about him. There was in fact no need for these questions. Questions like, Woman, why are you weeping? And to the disciples, Why are you troubled? And why do questionings arise in your heart? I say there was really no need for these questions. Because when we open the New Testament to read the amount of Christ's resurrection we discover that the first persons to believe in him believed in him not because of the witness of angels nor did they believe in him because Jesus himself had made a visible appearance to them.

The first persons to believe in him were John and Peter. They had received the word from the woman that the tomb was empty and they came to explore it for themselves. John who reached the tomb second but went into it first saw the linen clothes which had been rolled about him and the napkin which had been about his head, not lying with the linen clothes but rolled up in a separate place by itself, he came to a solid conclusion of faith. That evidence of the cocooned like clothes of the Lord lying there propelled him to a statement. He recognize that violent hands could not have taken the body away and left the grave in this manner. That the religious opposition and the political leadership that crucified him would have no interest in his body now that he were dead. He himself had been with the disciples and knew their whereabouts in that previous evening and early morning hour. There was but one conclusion to make as he looked at the grave clothes of his Lord. He is risen! No angel. No risen Lord to tell him. But he looked

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at the evidence and he logically concluded he is risen. Peter looked in then and made the same conclusion of faith. Peter looked in then and made the same conclusion of faith.

This is the highest statement of faith. A statement of faith which Christ calls us in this day to follow. A recognition that the claim of the resurrection is not simply based upon the unique appearances which he made to his own but one, even without seeing him, can believe. Because the evidences are credible evidences. Jesus of Nazareth was crucified. He was buried.

The fact remains universally uncontested that his body was never again discovered by the world after his burial. There is but two conclusions that are possible. He is either risen or the disciples put across the most perverse fraud of blaspheme that the world has ever known.

But not all of the disciples were of the same high intensity and level of faith as were Peter and John. That's why the Lord came to them, questioning them, and why he comes to us today through the scriptures, questioning us.

He says to Mark who loved him, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She was dead certain the resurrection had not happened. Three times she had repeated the same phrase as though it were locked in her jargon. She couldn't escape from the words: "They have taken away our Lord and we do not know where they have laid him." Three times she says it. She is so convinced that it is true. Unwilling to examine every other evidence as grief often causes us to deny God. As grief often crowds out the possibility of miracles when a tragedy happens in our life or a reverse of incredible proportions. We too through our tears wonder if God is there and is alive and real.

So Jesus comes to us questioning today and says, Why are you weeping? When the question of the resurrection is settled we know that there is moment in which all rears will be wiped away. There will be joy inexhaustible for all who follow Christ.

To the disciples on the road to Emmaus, Jesus comes again with the question of truth. He says to them "What conversation are you having with each other as you walk?" Here they had been with the disciples early that morning. They had been in the room when the women had fled from the tomb and brought the news that the body as missing and an angel had shared a report that he is risen. Yet they themselves do not bother to check the evidences out. They themselves had not even gone to the gravesite. They are instead going back to their homes. Going back to their old life without bothering to check the whole thing out. They have already in their minds de-evaluated their opinion of Jesus. He had been Messiah. Now he was only a prophet.

So Jesus comes at us today and probes us with this question: What are you thinking? What are you talking about? What are you really saying of Jesus? In your response to him have you had a de-evaluated opinion of him? He wants to reveal himself to you on this Easter day. Again and again Jesus will come at this question of truth to the disciples: Why are you fearful? Why are you troubled? Why do questions arise in your heart? Just days before they had been fearful of men so much so they had fled because death was the overpowering fear that they lived with. Now however there has been something proven to them that is stronger than death. That is the risen presence of the Savior. One can only fear that which is stronger. If death is no longer the greatest fear then one must fear what is greater than death. The beginning of wisdom, as the scripture says, is the fear of the Lord.

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Now they saw him risen in their midst. They were afraid. That's why he speaks to them as he does to us. Fear not. Peace be with you.

To Thomas, the Lord attacks this question of truth by saying, "Have you believed because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe and have not seen."

Saul of Tarsus. Christ will later say "Saul, Saul why are you persecuting me?"

All of these questions probe at truth because Jesus is truth. Indeed as Paul confesses "If Christ has not risen from the dead then today our faith is in vein. We of all men, most to be pitied because we have believed a perversity. We're still in our sins. And further than that we have committed blasphemy against God by saying Jesus is God's Son. When, if he has not risen from the dead, he in fact is not God's Son and we have all blasphemed the name and the character of God."

First, the question of truth.

But our Lord, when he has dealt with those questions turns and begins to look at some other questions that are upon our hearts as well. He comes to his disciples who are gathered at the Lake of Galilee some days after his resurrection, and he says to them, after they have spent the night in fishing and have caught nothing. They were fishermen and recognized that the Lake of Galilee yielded the most fish in the evening hours. So all night long they had caught nothing and the Lord comes to them and says, "Children, have you caught anything?" I see in that question of the Lord the Lord's concern for our failures.

I see that he knows when I've toiled all the night and caught nothing. I see that he understands when what I have expected from my family has not materialized. I understand that when he looks at what I expected from my career and sense of personal fulfillment and if that has not materialized he understands that I have come up empty. He understands the empty moments that drive me to alcohol and to drugs. He understands the empty moments of my life, which plague me with suicidal thoughts and despair. He knows where we are all at and he understands us in our failures. And he wants us to come to grips with those failures so he asks us point blank – Have you caught anything? Are you fulfilled?

Isn't it striking that the Lord knows precisely what the disciples are doing all during those evening hours? Once he recognizes what we're doing he offers us a solution to our problems. He says Try my way.

To the disciples the way they're to salvage their failure is to cast the net in on the other side and they'll bring up a catch a fish. But to the failures in our life for every one of them there is a solution in God. It may be a unique way the solution comes to each person. We find later for example when the Jerusalem church ran out of food and was having a time of famine the Lord did not give them the solution of sending apostles back to Galilee to catch a lot of fish for the Jerusalem saints. He had another solution for that problem. Some of the other Christians were to help out financially with the need.

But whatever the problem, Christ is the answer.

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God understands your failures. God understands the box you may be locked in today and he provides through Jesus Christ a solution and escape. A way out.

These concerns for the Lord for truth and for our failures are followed by another concern of the Lord. A concern for his church. Not the building. Not the organization. But people. People whom Christ died for. People whom Christ has loved. Christ now is leaving the world and as he in John 21 in that seaside scene with the disciples at the lake of Galilee it will be just a few days until he has transferred his authority to the apostles and the work of his church will go on without his personal physical presence. He loves his church and wants to insure that they're cared for. He recognizes that in just weeks of time the church is going to expand tremendously. In one day 3000 are going to believe and in another 5000 men, not including women and children. It's going to be a big catch. He had told the disciples when he had first called them the fishers in the group, he said, You'll no longer catch fish; you'll catch men.

To that miracle of the nets being full, the Lord is also teaching this truth, that when the disciples as his fishers for the hearts of people stretch out the net of the gospel it's going to take in a very fabulous catch. And the striking thing is the nets are not going to break. The 120 that are going to be called upon to care for the 3000 and then the 5000 and then the thousands beyond that, all of he stress that that can place upon an organization, upon people, the assuming of care for other individuals. The nets will not break because Christ has placed in his body the strength to deal with human problems and needs.

It's out of concern for his church now that the Lord comes to Simon Peter and says to him, "Do you love me more than these?" Christ's qualification for those who will be custodians of his church is a simple qualification of love. He did not say to Peter, nor does he say to us, "Are you worthy?" We'd have to say no. He does not say to us "Do you promise that you'll never fail again?" None of us could make that promise. He does not say "Are you sure you're 100%" we'd have to say no.

It's a very simple qualification: Do you love me? If you love me then you'll be concerned for my body, your brothers and sisters – the church. Peter, lovest thou me more than these? More than these? Just days before Peter had said, "Lord, though they all deny you, I'll never deny you." Now Peter are you saying your love is greater than the other disciples? Or are you saying that your love is greater than your vocation?

Peter in humility responds, "Yea, Lord. Thou knowest I love you." It's striking what's happening here in the Greek language in which the New Testament is written. Jesus, in addressing Simon says, "Simon do you *agape* me?" *Agape* is the strongest Greek word for love. It is the kind of love that is expressed on the cross. Peter responds with, "Lord you know that I *phileo* you." That's a strong word but there's a nuance of difference between the two. Peter on three counts is proving his humility. He's saying, "I don't love you more than the rest of these. I've given up trying to compare myself to other believers. I don't know if I love you more than these things. I don't even love you in the pure way that you have stated. But, Lord, you know that I have affection for you. You know I feel for you." He appeals to Christ's knowledge.

In order that Peter might be publicly restore even as he had publicly fallen through his denial the Lord repeats the question three times. "Do you *agape* me?" First. Peter says no, I *phileo* you. "Do you *agape* me?" No, I *phileo* you. Then finally the Lord accommodates himself to Peter's answers "Do you *phileo* me?" And he says, "Yes, Lord. You know that I do."

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It's a tender moment. The Lord says, "Then feed my lambs, tend my sheep and feed my sheep." In other words the Lord says translate your love for me into love for others. The measure of your love will be the way you relate to other people who are mine.

A final question which the Lord raises expresses his concern for our personal obedience. When Simon is through confessing his love for the Lord, has received the task which Christ has given to him to tend the flock of God, the good shepherd has laid down his life for these sheep. Christ was now giving his most priceless possession to Peter and to the others and eventually to us to take care of. The Lord then gives a very direct word of prophecy to Peter. He says, "Simon, when you were young you went where you would. But when you're old others shall lead you where you do not want to go and they will gird you." John says very flatly that through this saying Jesus was referring to Peter's death. Church tradition tells us that Peter in fact died crucified being roped to a cross, a much longer kind of crucifixion than that even suffered by our Lord. There must have been tremendous tears welling up in the eyes of Jesus as he said this knowing the future of this beloved friend of his, Simon. This is what is going to happen. Behind all of that emotion is the Lord's knowledge that he's going to see Peter again on another shore. It's not all suffering. Suffering doesn't have the last word.

But Simon who is concerned about this terrible fait that the Lord has just shared with him is concerned about if everyone else is going to have to pay the same kind of cost that he pays. John. "What's going to happen to him? Is his life going to be spilled out like mine? Are you going to require the same thing of him that you're requiring of me?" The Lord says, "That's not your responsibility to know. What is that to you?"

It's so possible to get sidetracked from following Christ by looking at the way someone else may be responding to the call of Jesus. It may be that the Lord is asking of you what he's not asking of someone else and it will only defeat you in your following him if you knew what was prepared for them. All that is for you is to hear the call which Jesus re-institutes Follow me.

On the image of the Moravian church, it's symbol, here is an ox that stands between an altar of sacrifice and a plow. The motto is "Ready for either."

May God make you ready for either. May you sense how Christ God's only Son cares for all of you. It's symbol, here is an ox that stands between an altar of sacrifice and a plow. The motto is "Ready for either."

Our gracious, heavenly Father, on this Easter Sunday we want to give you thanks for loving us. We do behold your love for us. It is so pure. It is so gentle and yet so strong. It seeks us. It wins us. It comes even when we don't have the intelligence to grasp what you're up to or what you're saying. Your love reaches through to us and we confess with you that God is love. We thank you Lord on this Easter Sunday for asking us the questions, which really touch our lives. I pray for friends here today that have really been looking for truth. And they've been confused to what is truth. I ask, Lord Jesus, that in this service this morning there would have been that special touch of your Holy Spirit, which would have kept them in the center of their life and said Jesus is the truth. I pray for those friends today who've come and this is a time of failure for them. They feel like they've been doing an awful lot for an awfully long time. And they've seen no results and they're terribly frustrated and tired. We ask you, Lord, for them to find the solution to their experience. And experience

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the full catch of opportunity and joy. We also recognize, Lord, that your concern is for your church. You want us to care for the little folk, the lambs. You want us to care for one another, the sheep. You say to us, If you love me take care of your brothers and sisters, your family, your Christian family. They're all very, very precious to me. I love every one. I give them to you to keep. Lord, if there's anyone here today who's fighting with the question of fairness, help them Lord, to fix their eyes only on you and follow you no matter what someone else has done or is doing. For it's your love we seek and love. Through Jesus. Amen.