

Proper 25

Our last month of reading with Jesus has been full of questions, mostly from the 22nd chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, a chapter full of argument and confrontation, set in the tense days after Jesus entered Jerusalem and just before his condemnation and death. It reminds me of Prime Minister's Question Time in the British parliament. Most of the questions were asked by his critics, after the tumult he had caused. They asked him about paying taxes to the emperor, about the greatest commandment, about where he got the authority to do the upsetting things he was doing. Many pointed questions, with criticism inherent in them. And he asked pointed questions of them as well. Whose face is on the coin you'd use to pay that tax? What do you think about the Messiah; whose son is he? Oh, it is like the worst Annual Meeting a rector can imagine! Yes, the questions were flying in the 22nd chapter of Matthew and the dramatic days it remembers to us.

Questions, we are often told, are wonderful things.

Curiosity is a great trait to cultivate.

I see admonitions to it on the walls of my boys' school.

We like to see this in others, an enthusiasm for life and hunger for knowledge.

We do well to live with a sense of some questions always before us.

What is next for me?

How is God calling me?

What is the Lord's claim on my life?

How can I help my neighbor?

Who has great needs in my life?

And who is this Jesus to me?

And how is the Holy Spirit at work in my life and among us?

What must I do to be saved?

Questions are life-giving things, a sign that we are self-satisfied but hungry for more from life and more from God.

Accept other people's answers too soon and too often and your life will wither.

Our brothers and sisters in the Lutheran church and some other Protestant traditions are marking the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in Germany this month and particularly today.

That movement began when Martin Luther offered 95 theses that questioned some of the practices and theology of the church as it had existed in the years before Luther's intervention.

The Protestant movement Luther unleashed was unsettling and destabilizing,

with a built-in restlessness, an endless desire to question the sources and undertake whatever revolution was necessary to return to fidelity to those sources.

It was thus a Biblical movement, one that let the sometimes raw, questioning energy of the Bible spill over the orderly walls of the church. For the Bible isn't a long document meant to provide a prescription for stability. The Bible threw Augsburg, Geneva, Canterbury and Edinburgh off balance, as the prophets and Jesus and Paul, whose words the Bible remembers, had undone Jerusalem, Capernaum, Babylon, Athens, and Rome. The Bible questions the conventions and injustices human civilization accepts and lays before us the just demands of God.

Questions, however, let us admit, are also exhausting. On the way to school any morning, I try to answer questions about airplanes' condensation trails, why geese wander in fields, or how babies get out of their mothers' bodies. And the minute, the second I am alone in the car, I turn the radio news on and let someone else explain the previous day's events to me. It is wonderful; the people on the radio ask questions and other people on the radio answer them, usually from a position of authority or knowledge. I just listen. It is very reassuring, after I've struggled to remember the things my sons' want to know.

So that's a thing about questions; much as we are kept alive by them, much as we are kept honest by them, much as the Bible asks them, to reform our lives and the church, there comes a point where we want some answers as well. Luther's 95 theses were not questions, actually, they were statements, declarative in nature. And the questions that the Bible asks, it usually answers, albeit in terms that are sometimes challenging and far from pat.

The Creed we will say together in a moment and the Scriptures themselves offer a great body of guidance, wisdom, and divine truth, on which a human life, a church, even a culture could be built. These sources will withstand your prodding; indeed they invite your questioning and repay it with deeper riches. And they will ask you questions in return, becoming your challenger, interrogator, and a mirror in which to see yourself. Questions and their answers and questions about those answers, an enlivening cycle of seeking and finding and being sent, reside in these ancient, inspired sources.

These sources lead us to Jesus Christ, himself the answer to our great question (Who is God?) and our great longing, to see and know that living God. Christ's own lively mind and questioning way endure in his resurrection life, in which he is a living partner for conversation, a teacher, and the supreme authority, who send the Spirit to work in your mind and life. If you know him in prayer and study, you will find him a challenging savior, the answer who also questions, keeping you alive during our earthly chapters and to eternal life.

