

Questions and Answers

a sermon

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Trinity Reformed Church

July 30, 2017

Romans 8:26–39

Little kids are full of questions. It's how they grow. It's how they live. Life for them is a rush of exploring, with the again and again of "Why?" moving it all forward.

Sometimes the questions are meant to test boundaries or challenge authority.

"Go to bed."

"Why?"

"Put away your toys."

"Why?"

That isn't all a bad thing. We all have a need to learn where the lines are, and little ones have only so many tools available for them to do that.

But the questions children ask may also be to get information, or direction. They may ask them so they can do something better, or do it at all. Their questions may come out of a need not to get hurt, or a desire to please those they love. In all this there is growth, and there is life.

As my children have grown, there's been an interesting shift, one I think most of us likewise experience as we grow from childhood into adulthood. They no longer ask me or Tammi that many questions. Certainly none of the rapid-fire assault of "why" so many little ones inflict on their guardians. The questions, when they come, are much more task- and project-oriented, relating to adultish things they are going through, like applying to college, or looking for a job, or ordering something online, or planning a road trip to Nebraska with friends to watch the total solar eclipse next month.

(Yup. Child number 2 really is going to do that last one.)

So, my kids don't ask that many questions of us anymore. Instead, we're asking *them* questions:

So, what'd you do today?

Where are you going?

When will you be home?

How much does it cost?

How are your classes going?

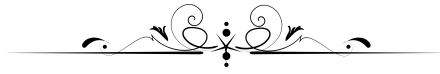
We ask them a lot of questions. I think they like it!

Well, maybe not.

They *tolerate* it.

Even so, I know that they know: this is one way we show them our love, by asking them questions. And they know, as I know: their answers, even if given with a bit of resistance, are a sign, too, of their love for us.

Questions and answers: they can be, and maybe should be, the stuff of life, and the stuff of love.



In our passage today, Paul asks a number of questions.

*Who will bring any charge against God's elect?
Who will separate us from the love of Christ?
Will hardship,
or distress,
or persecution,
or famine,
or nakedness,
or peril,
or sword?*

These are all questions. But, even though they might remind us of it, they are not the “why? why? why?” of little kids. Neither are they, really, questions that left Paul wondering. He was not really asking these questions because he did not know the answer. He *knew* the answer.

I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

He's not questioning. He's quite certain.

Even some of the questions Paul asks are not really questions, but statements of faith in the form of questions:

*If God is for us, who is against us?
He who did not withhold his own Son,
but gave him up for all of us,
will he not with him also give us everything else?*

Paul's answers to his questions were ultimately about God's power and love that raised Jesus from the dead, a power so strong and a love so deep that all those who are joined to Jesus through baptism have their future secure in God's loving and powerful hands.

That was Paul's answer.

His answer was Jesus.

But to get to that answer, the answer that was at the heart of his faith in God, Paul had to raise these questions. And these I believe, arose from questions that so many of the Christians Paul loved and was writing to had on their minds, troubling their souls and disturbing their sleep.

For Paul is talking about something most people, including (I expect) all of us, have experienced ... and have experienced quite a bit.

He is talking about worry.

He is talking about anxiety.

He is talking about questions that trouble *our* souls and disturb *our* sleep.

And not the little questions or the small worries, but deep, existential questioning, about
the fear of death,
the threat of meaninglessness,
the terror that all our labors will one day vanish,
the haunting uncertainty of any permanence,
the wondering whether I might be separated
from all I have known
and all I have loved.

That is what Paul is talking about. And, you see, for many, all living and doing is a frantic effort to stave off annihilation and to secure the future. And yet, we sense (even the young among us do) that it is a losing battle, humanly speaking.

You'd think Christians would not have such anxieties. But of course, we do. After all, we're human. And being human brings with it God-given possibilities and God-given limitations. Even for us Christians, *especially* for us Christians, each of these possibilities and limitations is marked by sin, even as it is redeemed by grace.

So, yes, we who profess belief in Jesus *do* worry.

We worry about the future.
We worry about death.
We worry that all we have built will come crashing down,
or be silently abandoned,
ignored or mocked by future generations,
when we slip into our graves.

Paul knew this.

He knew that faithful Christians worried about deep questions, troubling questions, questions that rattled around in their souls and kept them awake at night.

He knew that their minds engaged in troubled worrying about the tomorrow lying beyond their mortal days and the "next" that is beyond their knowing.

He knew that his fellow followers of Jesus were concerned about whether they really did have a future with God.

He knew that those whom he had in mind as he wrote wondered whether they might die for their faith and then that would be it.

Yet, Paul also knew that these questions had an answer, an answer with a name, *this* name: Jesus.

Hear Paul again:

What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us.

Yes, Paul names Jesus as the answer to his friends' troubling questions. It is Jesus who shows the security of God's love. It is Jesus who makes secure that same love. In Jesus none of those

threats Paul named — hardship, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword — none of these are ultimate. Even should one of Christ's own suffer one of those threats,

none of them will have the last word,
none of them will result in separation from God,
none of them will be finally true showing God to be essentially false,
none of them ... will *win*

— because Jesus is the answer.



This is real deep, and deals with real stuff.

Because Paul is answering the questions that afflict most all of us with an answer that is far more secure than any other answers people offer. Against the questions and the questioning that lie in our bones and keep us awake at night, we've tested many answers, and we've tried many therapies, some of them somewhat effective but not ultimately so.

We've tried self-improvement.
We've tried engagement with political causes.
We've tried rescuing others.
We've tried alcohol.
We've tried sex.
We've tried entertainment.
We've tried social media.
We've tried all manner of distractions and causes and narcotics.

None of them touch the problem. Not really. Not enough.

Eventually, some of us find our deepest empowerment and most profound contentment in the answer Paul names, in the name of Jesus.

Now, in a culture in which answers

are just opinions,
or the means for getting what you want,
or what you write down on a test,

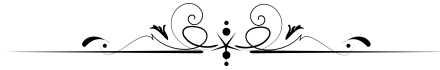
it might be strange, even misleading, to call Jesus "the answer."

But Jesus isn't the answer in any of those ways.

Jesus is not the answer in that by him we get what we want.
He isn't the answer by being the tool for self-advancement.
He isn't the answer by being another opinion or idea.

No, *he* is the answer, and the answer he gives to our worries and distress is *himself*. Jesus is the answer, because God answers our worry and our despair with the living and dying and rising of this Jesus.

He is the answer because he proves God's love.
He is the answer because he shows God's power.
He is the answer because his cross is bare and his tomb is empty.
He is the answer because he lives and gives us a place:
with him,
in him,
under him,
for him,
through him,
to him.



I said that this is real deep, and deals with real stuff. This really is about real life. So it is important that we know this, and remember this, and live this, and tell this.

You see, people drift away from church these days. For a good many of them, it's because it seems so irrelevant to them.

Maybe they used to come, but they've stopped coming, because they have come to believe that there are other more interesting, practical, and relevant things for them to do on Sunday morning. And maybe churches are irrelevant.

Maybe the things said and done in churches throughout this land, this church and others, strike people as remote from real life, as having no practical bearing on the lives people actually live. Maybe that's so.

But that's not because the message we're supposed to be speaking and living is irrelevant. No, it's because we have forgotten its relevance. It's because we have not embraced that message and realized its embrace of us sufficiently to see its profound, life-giving and life-altering relevance.

It simply is not true that the message, the gospel given for and to us, is irrelevant. Quite likely, the truth is that *we*, in passive denial of the Good News, have made *ourselves* irrelevant.

Sure, the good news of Jesus Christ is about heaven. But it's also about earth.

Sure, it's about the afterlife, but it's also about *this* life.

The good news, the gospel, is about salvation, but it's also about redemption;

justification *and* sanctification;

worship *and* mission;

comfort *and* challenge;

the love of God *and* the love of each other;

the rescue of souls *and* the healing of the nations;

being the church with each other *and* bringing the church to others.

The gospel is a lived story in which we are not only the prodigal child but also the welcoming parent.

The gospel is a lived story in which we are not only the wandering sheep that have been found but also under-shepherds who, under the direction of the Great Shepherd, go looking for other lost lambs.

The good news of Jesus Christ is spoken to real people with real problems. It is the answer to real people with real questions.

And we are among them.

We suffer worries great and small. We know the deep anxiety that lies at the core of all living. We are troubled by deep questions.

But we are also those who have been told the answer to those questions, the answer in the form of a person, the response in the form of divine self-giving and God's own union of power and love.

And his name is Jesus.

My friends, embrace the answer, the one who gives it, and the one who plants it in your heart, the Triune God who gladly receives all our questions. And seek to live that answer, the answer with a name, in all the reality in which you find yourself.