*A Sermon?*

8/10/2014

Job 38:1-11, Matthew 17:13-17

Do you ever ask God anything? Do you have questions about God? Do you often ponder big philosophical queries on the meaning of the universe, or are you just curious whether or not God has lips? Do you ever deeply desire for God to answer you? Do you wish God would speak loudly in bold declarative sentences like an announcer at a high school football game, or would you prefer God to gently place a personal note into your hand on a busy street before slipping away into the crowd? Do you realize in the Bible, especially in the book of Job, God asks questions instead of answering them? Do you remember reading the words of Jesus when he asked people questions? Did you know he asked over one hundred questions? Does God still ask us questions today? Are we listening for God to ask questions of us? What does that look like? How could we respond? What questions do you wrestle with about your life with God? Do you share your concerns, musings and uncertainties with anyone? Is there someone here in our church you can trust? Can you trust yourself with any of your questions? Do you sometimes pause to consider life and the concept of being Christian?

How do you encounter God? Would it be more appropriate and accurate to rephrase it "how does God encounter you?" Do you feel at home when you worship with us here in Third Space, or do you wish we would mix things up some Sundays? Where do you stand in relation to the pipe organ? Do you know and desire the feeling of the Holy Spirit moving over you in worship like a cool breeze on a spring morning? Are you comfortable with contemplating and sensing the presence of God as a handyman is comfortable in a shop, or does the thought make you feel awkward and a little queasy? If a sermon is forty-five minutes long, is it painfully drawn out or do you believe the pastor is just getting things going? Would you prefer that we did away with sermons all together and replaced them more time for prayer, a song or two or perhaps some time for silence? When you read the Bible, is your heart more in tune with the passionate reckless abandon of the Song of Songs, or you do feel safer in the presence of the pragmatic book of Proverbs? Do you like the music our band plays? Do you have to force yourself to not dance on those mornings when Rick is playing a fast, Latin tempo on the drums? Did you know Pam Adair writes some of the songs they play? Did you know the lady who plays piano and sings in our band is named Pam? Do you fancy the old hymns? Do you treasure your copy of the Cokesbury hymnal, reveling in the grainy texture of its brown cover? Are you familiar with the Cokesbury at all, even vaguely, or are you stumped by this reference? Do you feel comfortable when your mom asks you to pray before the meal at Thanksgiving? Do you pray at all? Are you still with me? How long do you think I can keep this up?

Do you feel you know enough about the Bible or theology or church history? What do the scriptures say about Amalekites? Are you comfortable leading a Sunday school class? Do you have strong feelings about the book of Revelation? Do you have strong feelings regarding those people who have strong feelings about the book of Revelation? If you could dedicate a year to taking classes in Jerusalem at the Hebrew University on the Old Testament prophets with no financial or personal repercussions, would you drop what you're doing immediately and buy plane tickets, or would you decline because you would rather spend the time doing practically anything else? What if the year would be spent studying the gospels? Would you prefer to spend that year building orphanages in third world countries? How about a year in a monastery in quiet contemplation and prayer? Which would be the best use of your time? Do you know why United Methodists baptize infants? Do you know why we are called "United?" Do you know and can you accept the person next to you answers any, perhaps all, of these questions differently than you? Is there a particular degree of disagreement you are willing to tolerate?

Seeing as I am in an interrogative mood, is there something you would like to ask me? If I told you I care deeply how you answer any of these questions, would you believe me? Would it surprise you to learn I sometimes worry late at night about how I portray God in my sermons on Sunday morning as well as my words and actions throughout the week? Did you know sometimes I even slow down on the interstate because I'm afraid one of you might recognize me driving too fast in my silly little car? In your understanding of this mysterious relationship between yourself and the divine creator of the universe, how do we as pastors factor into the process of communication? Assuming the answer to that question is a yes, even if marginally so, does my relative youth and lack of experience count as marks for or against me as a person who fits the role? What about my gender? My haircut or lack thereof? Do you know I pray for you, and do you know that I know you pray for me too? Did that last sentence have too many pronouns?

Do you rage against God like a wave crashing on rocks, or do you trust God with the same level of thoughtless confidence as the brake pedal in your car? Do you believe in your heart of hearts that God loves you? What gives you more pause, the idea God loves you or that God knows you? Do you think God loves and knows the person sitting next to you, that person you don't agree with I asked you about earlier, and do you believe you are called by God to know and love them too? Can you give an articulate description of your faith in three minutes or less? Do you ever discuss your claim to be Christian? Is your identity as a Christ-follower something private that you avoid telling your friends, like your membership to a stamp collecting club, or is it something your friends are sick of hearing so much about, like your college alma mater's football team?

Are you frustrated by my questions? Do you get the point of me just asking you questions in a sermon as we celebrate jazz mass and intentionally acknowledge different ways to worship? If you are not getting anything out of this, are you at least having fun? Do you believe this sermon is a device crafted solely for the purpose of raising your blood pressure? If you answered "yes" to that question, can you forgive me? Am I wasting your time? Are you wasting mine?

What questions should we ask of God? What questions should we ask of ourselves? How can we ponder the difficult questions of life? How can we move past the surface issues of our personal preferences to get to the heart of the matter? What does God expect of us today? What does God want us to do tomorrow? How can we make God and the pursuit of the abundant life a higher priority in our daily lives? Should we even bother?

When I'm done with my message, does the sermon have to end? Can it continue in conversations, arguments or prayers? When it's that time for me to say "amen" to signal we are entering the next phase of our service, should I not say it like a declarative statement? Should I say it in a way that tells you it's your turn to respond, not just to my simple words, but to the idea that God is communicating to all of us? What will you do? Amen?