

GBC Sermon, June 6, 2021  
"I've Been Meaning to Ask..."  
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I don't know about you, but my Facebook and Instagram feeds have been flooded with proud moms and dads posting pictures of their graduates. I expect nothing less this time of year. I love seeing all of the graduation pictures - the cap and gown pictures, fun poses that capture their personality, and those that show off their interests and hobbies. My favorites though are the pictures of these graduates as they were growing up. Some of them I have known since they were babies, so the little ones in the pictures are somewhat familiar to me. Others, I have only known in their teen years, or I really only know the parents, so these infant, preschool, and grade school pictures are new for me and give me a window into their early years. Either way, what catches my eye every year is how you can still see that little toddler, preschooler, and elementary schooler in today's graduation pictures. Whether it's in their eyes, their smile, their expression, how they stand or hold their head a certain way - it's there. The photomontages that lead up to their graduation photo show an emerging unique and beautiful soul ready for the next stage in life, whatever it may be and wherever it may take them.

The toddlers and preschoolers in those photo montages show images of curious kids with mud-caked hands and faces full of cake icing. They show mischievous grins, and eyes full of curiosity. Their minds were likely full of questions that came spilling out all of the time about all of the things. We have all seen the cycle of questions that goes a little something like this

"Let's go downstairs."  
"Why?"  
"Because it's time to go"  
"But why?"  
"If we don't leave now we will miss it."  
"Why?"

**OR**

"Put on your coat."  
"Why?"  
"Because it's cold outside."  
"Why?"  
"Because it's winter."  
"Why?"  
"Because God gave seasons"  
"Why?"  
"Because God wanted to."

The cycle of why questions can go on endlessly and often ends with parents feeling defeated and eventually answering with something like "Because I said so.", "Just because." or my dad's favorite "That's for me to know and you to find out."

As children grow older and become a little less curious, their questions come at a slower pace. But often *these* questions are deeper and harder to answer. The simple quips that we use just to give them just don't work anymore.

"Why did my friend hurt my feelings like that?"

"Why did my pet hamster die?"

"Why do bad things happen to good people mommy?"

"Daddy, why do we call it Good Friday if something bad happened?"

"Why did God give grandma cancer?"

Our kids' curiosity can drive us crazy but often it is that same curiosity that causes us to dig deeper into our own beliefs and find answers that we never knew we had. Their questions can also lead us to more questions of our own, questions that expand our own understanding of life, faith, and God. The answers are important but more important are the curiosity and the courage to ask the questions in the first place.

Years ago, I used to lead a class at the Unidiversity camp that our youth love called *For Seniors Only*. This was a seminar class in which we talked about all things practical and faith-related as these recent graduates were about to head off to college, trade schools, and their first full-time jobs. This was their chance to talk about all of the excitement surrounding their upcoming freedom and ask all of the questions they didn't want to ask their parents. As part of my prep for that class, I would spend a few weeks prior to camp asking every adult I knew "What is one thing you learned your first year away from home that you wish you had known before you left?" The answers I got varied from sage advice like "Don't drink and dial", "Tree vs. Car - tree always wins", "Don't sign up for that free credit card offer" "Surround yourself with good people" or "Your mom and dad are smarter than you think they are" to practical advice like "I wish I had learned how to wash laundry properly", "Sit near the front, especially in difficult classes" and "Make sure the professor knows your name". Among all of the advice though, the pieces that came up every time in varying forms were

"Don't be afraid to ask more questions" and

"You don't have to have all the answers."

The adults who were answering my question knew 2 things:

- Questions are important learning tools and should never be left out of our toolkit for life
- And, sometimes the best answers aren't actually the answers themselves but the journey you take to find them. It's the mistakes you make, the assumptions that get turned around, and the people you meet along the way that often mean more than the original answer you were looking for.

Our scripture today lands us in an epic exchange of questions, answers phrased as questions, assumptions turned on end, and wisdom gained along a journey as Jesus begins to gather his first disciples. What are you looking for? Where are you staying? Can anything good come out of Nazareth? Follow Me. Come and See... *Genuine curiosity and doubt both* abound in the minds and questions of these new disciples.

Where are you staying? They ask Jesus. They weren't asking for an address or even a house tour. There's more to the question than that. In different words, the question may have sounded like: where are you from, what is your life like, how do I get to know you better and who you truly are? Their curiosity is genuine and sincere- a desire to more fully understand this Lamb of God or Rabbi that John has introduced them to. Their question was a sign that their minds and hearts were open to new knowledge. Hopefully, we approach faith and scripture with the same curiosity - a desire to learn more, know more, and understand more fully the meaning of what is before us?

Can anything good come out of Nazareth? This curiosity is filled with a little more doubt, apprehension, and maybe even some assumptive judgment as Nathanael questioned how greatness could come out of a town known for anything but. If we are honest, we have approached God with the same doubt, apprehension, and even assumptive judgment before. We have questioned the whys, hows, and whens of God.

The thing is - Jesus' response to all of this curiosity is the same. There is no judgment, no condemnation, and no suggestion to stop the questions or quell the curiosity but rather, an invitation. An invitation to come and see. An invitation to join the journey, ask more questions, and learn along the way. Maybe my dad's saying "that's for me to know and you to find out" was full of more wisdom and less sarcasm that I thought. Jesus invited Andrew, Peter, Philip, and Nathanael to 'find out' what he already knew, to join him on a journey. This journey was one of body, mind, and spirit. That small group eventually grew to twelve and to that more followers were added along the way. Each new journeyer bringing their own questions to the journey.

"Why do you speak in parables?"

"Who is the greatest?"

"What is the Greatest Commandment?"

"Will you teach us to pray?"

"What about him?"

"Don't you care that my sister left me to do all the work?"

"When will you return?"

"Lord, is that really you? Show me your hands so that I might see the scars."

And all along the way - the questions were welcomed. Some were answered with words, others with more questions and still others with an invitation to come and see, to continue to walk, learn, and experience together.

The piece that I didn't think about until I read this passage more carefully, is how each of the disciples' lives and stories interacted with the others along the way. They each learned as another asked a question or told a story about their newest revelation regarding God. They learned as they listened and told stories. They learned as they shared their growing faith as well their doubts.

I am thankful for the words that we read in scripture that give us insight into the growing faith of these disciples but I wonder about all of the words that were never written, The conversations they had with each other, with those whom they encountered, and even their conversations with Jesus - I wonder what those words would hold. I imagine that they would hold quite a few questions. Questions that were never answered. Questions that led to more questions and questions that led to deeper, different, or a new understanding of God and each other.

Those who journey with us through life and faith help us through the twists and turns, they help us scale the mountains and climb out of the valleys. These fellow journeyers challenge us in ways that help form our faith and find for ourselves what it is that we truly believe. I can see it in my own life. The adults I met in my younger years introduced me to a God of love and the concept of faith itself. The friends and leaders I met in my youth years challenged me to expand my knowledge of God and helped me begin finding my true self. The college years brought those who would challenge my beliefs and cause me to question with curiosity how much of what I believed was truly mine and how much was what I had been told. They helped me wrestle, in a good way, with the gaps and intersections between what I was taught and what I was beginning to believe for myself. In the years since, I have encountered many whose lives, stories and conversations have opened my mind, eyes, and heart to a more expansive view of God, creation, forgiveness, love, and grace. These people, the questions that we asked each other - the questions that we asked God together - the questions that I asked God because of the way their stories challenged what I thought I thought I believed and had always known - They - the people and the questions have shaped my faith in ways that I could never fully put into words. I wonder who those people are for you and how they have changed and shaped you into who you are today.

Over the next few weeks we are going to spend some time getting to know ourselves and each other more fully and through that, we will find in and through each other in ways that we might not have seen before. Today is the beginning of a sermon series in which we will ask ourselves questions such as 'where are you from', 'where are you hurting' 'what is it that you need', and ' where do we go from here'. Through these questions and more we will learn more about each other - even those whom we have known for years. What questions will you bring to the journey? What are the questions that you have been meaning to ask?

Maybe it's ' How can we believe in the same God and read the same Bible yet believe so differently?' OR 'Why are you so passionate about that particular cause?' OR 'Tell me about a time when God changed your mind.'

Perhaps the questions you have been meaning to ask are directed at God.

"God, why must this happen to me, haven't I had enough?", "God. I am trying to love you you taught us to love but it's just so hard, how can I keep on going?", "God, I just don't understand"

Let's all be curious together. Let's ask the questions. Let's ask them of God, ask them of each other, and those who we meet along the way. Let's be courageous enough to ask them of ourselves, and patient and brave enough to listen to all the answers. The

questions, the answers, and the stories that led to them will certainly lead to more questions, and that my friends is a good thing. That means that we are still learning, growing, loving, and living together.