

Lent Wonderings – Huh?

Scripture: Isaiah 40: 21-26

Date: March 28, 2021

PONDERING

MINISTRY TESTIMONIES

In the course of my ministries over the years I've come across many different people. One was a young person on a retreat who challenged me to prove how the dinosaurs fit into the bible. Truthfully it was only a test as I knew that his gateway to faith was less about dinosaurs and more about challenging the leader. I had another youth who was struggling with their identity and purpose in life and didn't see much purpose in moving forward and where was God in the midst of her pain. In another context I was engaged in several conversations with an elderly man in his late 80's who despite living all his life in the Christian Reformed Church was increasingly unsure of his place in heaven and of the truth of God's place in his heart.

BIBLE TESTIMONIES

There are many bible stories that all ask out questions of God in a similar way. The rich young ruler in Mark 10 came looking to Jesus for answers but the answer was too hard for him and he walked away. As Jesus was crucified on the cross there were two rebels or thieves also being crucified and one curse Him and yet the other wondered about the possibility of truth even as he was dying. Even Thomas – one of Jesus' disciples – following the resurrection needed physical evidence because he wouldn't / couldn't believe.

ISRAEL TESTIMONIES

Psalm 42 is an amazing psalm of encouragement as vs. 1 speaks of a deep hunger for God. But the much of the psalm speaks of a struggle to find God. Even as they remembered the good times in the temple, they affirmed their tears were their only source of nourishment as people were mocking them for their faith.

The text in Isaiah we've been using as our primary guide is rife with illustrations of a people – Israel - who has been given God's presence, God's purpose, God's power and God's promises YET have continue to struggle to faithfully live out God's calling. The text reveals their questions of where is God when times got harder. Vs. 2 cries out how much longer is Israel to be in exile from their homeland – from their God. Vs. 12-17 we can hear questions by Israel regarding God's authority over them and of God's responsibility to them. Vs. 25 we can understand their comparison of God to other foreign gods wondering if perhaps Yahweh is the same as those gods. Vs. 27 they complain that their way is hidden – from God – not just themselves and that their cause is disregarded – rejected – by God.

Through all of this we can hear through their questions – and some of God's responses – a sense of pondering / wondering even - is God big enough (over creation), is God powerful enough (over nations) and is God loving enough (over us). They are in a moment of uncertainty – a large moment – asking God a question of faith. Is all of this true?

POSSIBILITY

OUR HUNGER

Many in our world – many in our churches – have also asked questions of God often in our hardest / harshest times and places. We ask as well – as did the young person on the retreat - is God big enough to handle the issues in our world and to handle the questions, the uncertainty, the seeking within our lives.

We ask as did the young woman - is God powerful enough to handle the doubts and the fears of creation and to handle the flawed failures of creation. We also ask – as did the elderly gentleman – Is God loving enough to see beyond our uncertainty and chaos and confusion and to work to reconcile, restore and redeem the lost.

We wonder – as many have through the course of history and geography - Is God true? Is it true that God is:

The creator of ALL things

The covenant with broken things

The redeemer once and for all

The sustainer and fulfiller of life – in this world and in the world to come !

The lord over all creation

Really is it true

These questions are increased as our journey in life seems conflicted between Christ and culture. Christmas seems more Santa Claus than Saviour and Easter seems more about bunnies than being born again. The 'Jesus Industry' can make Christianity more commercial than Christlike with all of the merchandise designed to help Christians believe 'better' but for many outside the circle of faith they seem like trinkets in the temple that Jesus tried to remove.

It can feel like faith is a switch. Turned on with a warm Christmas glow but off during the hard winter months. Turned on with an Easter excitement and turned off with summer activities. On one hand we want Christianity to be true all the time and on the other hand it needs a lot from us to be true all the time.

The season of Lent describes this journey that is filled with questions of who God is and who we are to God. We are challenged by God to seek Him and celebrate Him and to serve Him. We are challenged by God to be the source of all we are and the source of why we do all we do.

OUR HELP

God answers Israel with a series of questions that ultimately declare I AM. That God is reminding Israel – and us - of the covenantal relationship that He initiated and restored and holds in His power. Vs. 21, 25, 26b and 28 all remind Israel – and us – that God DOES have authority over all things and the temporary things of this world are incomparable to His greatness. There is no equal to God.

God also responds to Israel – and us – with proclamations that answer that address our ponderings. Vs. 22 reminds Israel that God has authority over all things. He is the creator and is above and beyond all things. Vs. 23-24 reminds Israel that God has responsibility over all things. God does speak to nature and nations as well. There will be a restoration and a redemption for Israel and the changes and challenges of this world are nothing compared to the constancy of God. Vs. 21 and 26 remind Israel – and us – of God’s purpose (care) for all things. In verse 21 God speaks directly with the word ‘you’ and vs. 26 speaks of knowing the space and the state of each and every star.

OUR HOPE

God answers the questions Israel posed – and more - because He IS the answer in our lives. This love of God is our hope – our strength – our faith. Isaiah 40 begins with an encouragement of comfort – vs. 1 and ends with an empowerment of strength – vs. 31. In between God engages Israel as their tender shepherd – vs. 11.

God reminds Israel – and us – that He’s not beyond our pondering but also that we’re not beyond His proclamation. As if Israel’s conundrum of faith was too big for Him to deal with and as if Israel’s conundrum of faith was too small for Him to care about.

In the broadest scope of life and faith - pondering is often seen as a bad thing but in actuality pondering is merely thinking about something. Pondering is not an indictment of faith and we can think of Mary pondered the angel’s words of Jesus in Luke 2: 19. We are reminded that pondering – wondering – is not necessarily an ongoing doubt or denial of God’s place in our lives but an opportunity of growth through a search to understand the gap of faith that only a focus upon Jesus can fill. They become an opportunity to remember the covenantal promises of God. They become an opportunity to believe the Christological power of Jesus to fulfill the gap of reconciliation.

APPLICATION / CONCLUSION

Lent is a journey which is less about having answers than a willingness to seek the questions. It is more about the revelation of Jesus and how we are connected to Him. Lent is a journey of moving from the darkness into light. A light that reveals our hurting nature but also the healing God before us. Lent is about moving forward – forward from less doubt into more faith.

Holy Week – Psalm Sunday to Easter Sunday – is an invitation to continue to ponder the vastness – the beauty – the glory of God. It’s also an invitation for you to continue to ponder your place within this journey. As people who are made by God but are standing as broken pieces before God. Yet are still called back to God through Jesus.

Good Friday and Easter – and beyond - are milestones of the journey of life and faith.

Come and see. Come and be

AMEN