

Questions Jesus Asked sermon series

“Why Are You Crying?”

[John 20:11-18](#)

Through our current sermon series, “More Questions than Answers,” which will conclude next Sunday, we have learned how Jesus asked more questions than he was asked. In fact, he often asked questions in response to questions he received.

Some of the questions Jesus asked were simple and straightforward, while others were rhetorical and did not require an answer. Some were meant to convince, while others were to convict. Sometimes, he asked questions that silenced those who were trying to trap him. And, some questions were loaded with emotion. He continued to ask questions throughout his life and ministry, even as he was facing death. In the Gospel of Matthew, the question “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” are the last words Jesus speaks before taking his last breath on the cross.

And then, according to the gospels of Luke and John, the first words Jesus speaks after his resurrection are in the form of a question. Yes, even after his death and resurrection, Jesus was still asking questions!

In Luke, the risen Christ asks the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, “What are you discussing with each other as you walk along?” (Luke 24:17) And, as we heard from today’s scripture reading, in John, Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene and asked her, “Woman, why are you crying? Who are you looking for?” (John 20:15) In these two Gospels, you can find a few more questions the risen Christ asked his disciples as he further appeared to them: In Luke, he asks, “Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?” and “Do you have anything here to eat?” (Luke 24:38, 41); While in John, he asks “Have you believed because you have seen me?,” “Children, you have no fish, have you?” and “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?,” which Jesus repeats two more times to Peter.

You would think that after his resurrection, Jesus would have made some important statements to his disciples. He could have said something as simple as: “It’s me, my beloved! I am back!” Actually, that was what my mother-in-law said to me when she appeared in my dream a few months after her death. Or, he could have said something profound like: “Behold, I died and came back to life. God my father raised me from the dead, so that you would be set free from the bondage of sin and death.” Or, he could have said something reassuring such as: “My children, I love you and I will never leave you again.”

However, that was not what Jesus did. Instead, he asked questions, just as he had done before. And this morning, I would like us to reflect on the first question he asked to Mary Magdalene on the day of his resurrection: “Woman, why are you crying?” We do not know in what tone of voice Jesus asked this question to Mary and what he actually meant by it. So, we will have to imagine.

Perhaps, Jesus sounded perplexed or disappointed. “Woman, why are you crying?” More than once, he had told his disciples about his death and resurrection. He had specifically told them that on the third day of his death, he would rise. He had promised he would come back. So, perhaps he was disappointed at, or puzzled by Mary’s weeping.

Or perhaps, Jesus sounded sympathetic. “Woman, why are you crying?” Jesus knew why Mary was crying. She was distraught. The teacher and mentor who had healed her and given her new life had suffered and died on the cross. And, now, his body was missing. She did not know what to do next. She felt completely lost in her sadness and sorrow, her desolation and despair, her helplessness and hopelessness. Jesus perfectly understood Mary’s emotions. He had experienced them himself at the death of his dear friend, Lazarus, as well as his own death. So, perhaps Jesus was trying to comfort her.

This image is very comforting to us. God knows us. God knows where we are and what we are going through. In our pain and suffering, God in Christ comes to us and stays with us like a good friend, comforting our heavy hearts which are full of sadness and sorrow. Even in the darkest times of our lives, God who raised Jesus from the dead is with us, guiding us out of the darkness, leading us to light, and raising us up to new life.

Martin Luther, the great reformer often struggled with severe depression. He had good reasons for feeling down. The Pope was after him. His colleagues were bickering among themselves. He was trying to balance among his responsibilities as professor, pastor, and father. And kidney stones caused him excruciating pain. One day, his wife put on black mourning clothes. Thinking she was going to a funeral service, Luther asked her, “Who’s dead?” She replied, “God.” Luther rebuked her, “What do you mean God is dead? God cannot die.” She said, “Well, the way you have been acting, I was sure He had.” Did he get the message? Of course, he did. He wrote down a Latin word on his desk: *vivit*, which means “He lives.” Whenever things were not going well for him and he was tempted to complain about them, Luther looked at the word and got out of his downward spiral quickly.

Or perhaps, Jesus' question to Mary sounded at once challenging and encouraging when he asked her, “Woman, why are you crying?” According to the Gospel of Luke, during his trial, Jesus noticed that a group of women were beating their breasts and wailing for him, and he said to them, “Daughters of Jerusalem, don’t cry for me. Cry for yourselves and for your children. The time is coming when they’ll say, ‘Lucky the women who never conceived! Lucky the wombs that never gave birth! Lucky the breasts that never gave milk!’ Then they’ll start calling to the mountains, ‘Fall down on us!’ calling to the hills, ‘Cover us up!’ If people do these things to a live, green tree, can you imagine what they’ll do with deadwood?” (Luke 23:28-31, MSG)

Perhaps, Jesus wanted to remind Mary what he had told her. Then, she’d better not cry for him but for herself and for her children, for the future because things won’t get any better but worse. In fact, soon after this, persecutions toward Christians began. And following a revolt, the Roman Empire captured Jerusalem and destroyed both the city and the Temple in it.

If we imagine Jesus’ question in this way, it calls our attention to others, those who are crying among us. They cry because they are hungry or hurting. They cry because they feel rejected and lonely. They cry because they have lost their loved ones. They cry out of their helpless and hopeless. They cry with fear. And their cries ring out from the refugee camp and the detention center, from the prison cell and in the hospital. Their cries ring out unheard inside of homes and ignored on the streets. God calls our attention to those who weep, to cry for those who are crying.

As Jesus, the risen Christ appeared to Mary outside his tomb, he comes to us today when and where we least expect him. It’s so unexpected that we may not recognize him, just as Mary did not initially see Jesus. Christ breaks into our lives with his love and asks us the question Mary heard, twice, first from the angels and from him directly, “My

friend, why are you weeping?" Whatever our answer might be, know that he calls us by our name and sends us out to the world with the proclamation of his resurrection. The [chancel choir sang](#) it beautifully earlier. Let us hear it again:

Christ Our Passover has been sacrificed for us,
So let us celebrate the feast,
not with the old leaven of corruption and wickedness,
so let us celebrate the feast,
But with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.
Christ once raised from the dead dies no more;
Death has no more dominion over him.
In dying, he died to sin once for all;
In living he lives to God forever more.
See yourselves therefore as dead to sin
And alive to God in Jesus Christ our Lord.
Christ has been raised from the dead;
The first fruits of those who sleep.
For as by one man came death,
By another has come also the resurrection of the dead.
For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.
Hallelujah! Amen!