

Sermon: Asking Questions

Readings: Haggai 1:15b-2:9 and Luke 20: 27-38

Luke's gospel is full of all sorts of questions; right at the start we hear Zechariah, the old priest ask, 'how will I know, when in my old age, I am to have a son?'. Likewise, Mary asks, 'how can it be that a virgin will have a son?'. Jesus too asks many questions, teaching questions that create curiosity, lead people to think and then listen to the answer with anticipation. People also come to Jesus with loads of questions, some are legitimate questions that seek truth and wisdom, for example we hear John the Baptist's disciples ask Jesus "are you the one?", we hear some scholars ask, "when is the kingdom of God coming?", and we listen in as a rich ruler asks "what must I do to inherit eternal life?". Other questions people bring are loaded questions sprung with a potential trap. These questions are attempts by those who are threatened by Jesus' popularity, wisdom, and miraculous powers. "Why do your disciples pluck heads of grain on the sabbath day?" the Pharisees ask. A lawyer tests Jesus with "what must I do to inherit eternal life?". The scribes and chief priests ask, "is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor or not?" and then of course we have today's question from the Sadducees, a long, complex hypothetical situation, which they hope will be Jesus' undoing.

You have probably all heard the old pulpit joke about why the Sadducees were called 'sad you see' because they didn't believe in the life hereafter. In creating the story about the widowed woman who according to the ancient Israelite law had to be given in marriage to the next brother in line, all seven of them, (there's some terrible bad luck going here) they try to show Jesus up by creating a kind of ethical dilemma; in the next life, supposing there is one, whose wife would she be, they ask?

Jesus brilliantly puts the argument to rest, by explaining that in the life to come, in the age of resurrection there will be no more death and no more marriage. Now wouldn't you love to ask Jesus some more details about all of that. I know I would; Jesus, will I still know and recognise my family, if my husband is no longer my husband will he still be special to me? What it will be like in the age of resurrection? Where is it? What does it look like? Do I need a ticket, or a boarding pass? How long is the tunnel that leads to the white light? Will angels come and get me when it's my time? I could go on and on.

Knowing that our curiosity has no limits and that we are designed by God to ask questions we are told by Paul in Corinthians that now, in this present life we see things imperfectly, like puzzling reflections in a mirror, but then, in the life to come, we will see everything with perfect clarity." Paul adds that all we know now is partial and incomplete, but then we will know everything completely, just as God now knows us completely. All we can know from today's gospel reading is Jesus' assurance that our God is the God of the living, not of the dead and that all people, past and present, are alive in him.

We shouldn't be surprised that in Luke's gospel we only get this partial glimpse of the life to come, with no detail, because there is something very interesting and curious going on within its pages. Luke always describes people coming to salvation and entering into the new life, the kingdom of God life as a 'right here, right now' event. We heard this just last

week, Jesus tells Zaccheus, Mr. Unpopular, the outcast tax collector, that “salvation has come to your house today”, not ‘oh good on you Zaccheus, when you die you will go to heaven now’, no, today! Jesus says, you have been saved from death. This right here, right now, theme is echoed all throughout Luke, “today... a saviour is born” announce the angels, “today.. the scripture is fulfilled” Jesus proclaims in the temple, “today.. you will be with me in Paradise”, Jesus tells the man strung up next to him upon the cross.

Luke’s gospel is focused on the kind of life Jesus enables us to lead right where we are, in the middle of this messed up, crazy old world. Kate Bowler, Christian, writer, historian, lecturer at Duke Divinity College and stage 4 colon cancer survivor puts it this way, “the question we must always answer is how do we live now? What Jesus has done in the past – loved us, saved us, given us a future- stands behind us and in front of us. We were saved and will be saved. But today we are in the lumpy middle”.

So what will we do as a church of believers, saints existing in the messy, lumpy middle? How should we spend our time, our energy, our resources as the embodiment of Jesus Christ in this place, here in Greystanes? Before I start talking about the m word, mission, the buzz word of the declining, crumbling church of the past decades, let me you ask you another question.

Knowing that we are saved and will be saved, shouldn’t we be less intimidated about trying new things, less concerned about triumph and failure, after all the victory has already been won, Christ has risen, Christ is risen indeed!

So here is yet again another question for you all, what are you hoping we can achieve together as Greystanes Uniting Church? I am not expecting answers straight away, in fact I think it may take a long time for this to become clear. We will need to work together as a team but there are answers to some of our questions already available within the scriptures.

There are lots of questions we can ask of the Bible, yet within its pages there are also lots of answers for today’s church. So here is my last question for today, I promise, we the people Greystanes,

Are we ready to discover those answers?

If you are already feeling over it, or exhausted, or not quite ready, let’s remind each other that in the strength of Christ and in the power of God all things are possible. For God is able to exceed with abundance all that we think or expect. **Amen.**