

Finding Peace in the Valley:
“Valley of Questions”
Luke 22:39-46

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I sent our youth pastor, Travis Garner, out on assignment this week to discover the number one question most children, youth and adults would ask God if they could. I asked Travis what he found and he replied that the question children most want the answer to is, “If God made spiders, why do people squish them?” I told him that only a kid would ask that question, so let’s move on to the next one.

Next he inquired of the youth and they said, “I don’t like the way I look. Why was God so unfair to me in this way?” I told Travis that he was supposed to ask other people questions, not something he would ask of himself, so let’s move on to the adult question.

Finally, he asked of the adults and most of them want to know, “How does prayer work? Why does God answer some prayers and not others?” O.K. I think I’ll try this one. How does prayer work? That may be on the mind of Jesus, so I think we will take a stab at this one.

I suppose I could conjure up some pat answers to these questions, but instead I want to share with you the advice of Rainer Rilke, advice that he gave to a young poet more than one hundred years ago. “Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves like locked rooms and like books that are written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then, gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.”

We catch up with Jesus in one of the most agonizing moments of His life. He’s in the Garden of Gethsemane praying to be delivered from the events of the next few days. Come let us learn from Jesus some lessons about “Living the Questions.”

THE TEMPTATION IS TO DEMAND ANSWERS. Pray that you will not fall into temptation – that you will not slip in the time of trial.

The temptation is to have an answer before we have worked the problem. Do you remember 6th grade math class? All the answers to the problems were in the back of the book. The very real temptation was to look in the back of the book instead of working the problem. We had the answer, but we lacked any understanding. That’s what happens when we say, “Jesus is the answer, but what is the question?” That’s what happens when answers to pain and suffering come from people who have not walked the valley and felt the shadows of death. That’s what happens when we are told to “Recite the right words, say the right prayers and you will be saved, without any signs of godly sorrow and true repentance.”

The temptation is to believe that I can comprehend the mysteries of the universe if they were revealed to me. Would God be God if we humans could fully explain him? Would life be better if we knew the exact time of our death? Is a predictable life a more meaningful life? Staff members, church members, and friends have asked me the last several weeks if I know how much time I have left on earth. What a stupid question. I certainly don't know and it's none of your business, so find a new topic of gossip.

Paul was right, *"Now we see but a poor reflection in a dingy mirror. What we know now is partial at best."*

So, I say to you, "Live the Questions," for questions are doors and windows for God to find his way into our souls. Face your uncertainties with faith. Learn the difference between self-doubts that are destructive and not-knowing which can lead to strength. Let the questions turn you inward in the search for truth, turn you outward into true community and turn you upward toward sure confidence in God. Let the process of wonder and exploration let you become a child and take you deeper than answers ever can. Live the questions.

SECONDLY, WE COME TO JESUS' PRAYER OF DEEP SURRENDER. *"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me, yet not my will, but yours be done."*

"Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives to pray." Prayer was a common practice of Jesus. At His baptism, He prayed. Before appointing His disciples, He prayed. On the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus prayed. When He was dying, He prayed. When He was rising, He prayed.

Tennyson was right, "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of." What kind of prayers do you pray? Some prayers are trivial. If God cared about basketball games he would have certainly let the underdog Kentucky Wildcats win last Sunday over Tennessee. Even in March Madness maybe God could care less about basketball.

Some prayers are controlling. We are content to bounce into the throne room, toss God a contract bearing our plans, and ask for His signature saying, "Just sign it and I will get out of your way, I know you are busy." Prayer is not a contract to be signed.

Prayer is not an insurance policy that you can just pull it out when the storms come, the terrorist attacks, or the test date arrives for which you are not prepared.

Prayer is not a request to be granted, but a relationship to be established. *"Father, if you are willing"* you get the feeling they had discussed this before. *"Yet not my will, but yours be done"*. It cannot be angry resignation, not stubborn submission, but instead, perfect trust. Oh, that we could learn to pray like that. Sometimes we say our lives are in the "Lord's hands" as a means of defeated resignation. We've done all we can do; let's see if the Lord can make any sense out of this. But the prayer of total surrender is so different. It is a prayer of trust, of peace, of blessed assurance. It is peace in the valley for you and for me.

We came to it through our own personal meditations, but as Sandy and I share the words of our prayers these days, the words are one “In our lives Lord, be glorified, be glorified.”

FINALLY THERE COMES THE ASSURANCE OF ANGELS TO STRENGTHEN US. *“An angel from heaven appeared to Him and strengthened Him.”*

All day and all night angels are watching over us; do you believe that? Seventy-five percent of Americans believe in angels; almost that many have a piece of jewelry depicting them. Angels are more than good luck charms. Angels are messengers of the Lord. They are persons, some with skin on and some not, through whom God is bringing wisdom, grace, humanity, kindness and friendship.

Compassion means to suffer with another person, to be there in whatever way possible, to share the circumstances of the other’s life as much as one can. We serve a compassionate God who reveals himself through caring people and through divine messengers who reveal themselves to us in the night. No group of people has suffered more through the centuries than the Jews. Martin Buber faced suffering first hand as a prisoner in the Nazi concentration camps. Buber became a master story teller. In his story, “The Angel,” he spins a tale about a torrent of pain and sickness that was unleashed across the earth. The air grew heavy with the moisture of tears. Even the legions that surrounded the heavenly throne were not immune to hovering sadness. One angel was so touched by compassion that he begged God to send him to earth for a year that he might lead it to an era of well-being. God smiled. And the shining angel came to earth bringing peace and joy where once reigned pain and sadness. While his progress was temporary, at least the people of great sorrow found some relief to their trouble.

Because we live in God’s world, He comes. He comes to us in our darkest hours to strengthen and to comfort.

□Neath that old olive tree,
 □Neath that old olive tree,
 Went the Savior alone on His knees;
 Not my will but thine be done,
 Cried the Father’s own Son,
 As he knelt, □neath that old olive tree.

Amen.