

“Asking the Right Questions”
Jeremiah 2:4-13; Luke 13:10-17
Rev. David Hutchinson
Sunday, September 1, 2019

Remember junior high school?

Anyone NOT want to remember it?

Remember all the tests and grades and homework...

Remember turning in your MATH homework?

Let me ask you this:

Have you ever answered every question correctly - - and still gotten an F?

It wouldn't make sense - - would it?

If you worked the problems correctly - - HOW could you STILL get an F?

Well it happened to me - - in Mrs. Johnson's math class in Jr. High.

I'm over it now.

Mostly...

How did this happen - - you might wonder?

Well - - imagine having NOT YET received your grade, and the teacher going around the classroom - - asking for answers - - and you NOTICE that - - you have DIFFERENT answers from everyone else. / Could it be - - that everyone ELSE is WRONG! / Only YOU - - are the genius that figured these questions out?!

Unlikely.

But the way things worked was - - I had to go to the chalkboard and work the problem in front of the class. / Which I did. / And another student raised her hand and said that I HAD worked the problem CORRECTLY! Ha!

And THEN she said - - BUT.

I had worked the problem correctly - - BUT - - it was the WRONG question!

It was question #7 from section A - - NOT section B!

I hadn't listened to the assignment - - or the teacher - - very well.

I had worked the WRONG questions.

I didn't answer the questions I was supposed to - - I answered the WRONG questions. / And THAT - - is how I got an F in Jr. High math class - - one sad rainy day - - years ago.

Of course what I should have done - - was step back for a second - - and be sure I had the bigger picture RIGHT - - before I did all that work!

But what I did was plunge ahead - - confident - - and unaware.

I simply - - was - - not asking the right questions.

And THAT - - is EXACTLY the same thing - - that got GOD frustrated - - in the Bible reading for this morning. / According to Jeremiah God is frustrated. / God - - and the prophet Jeremiah - - are upset with Israel - - because they are NOT asking the right questions.

In the Old Testament reading for this morning - - Jeremiah says it TWO times:

“They did NOT ask - - “where is the Lord?””

The right question would have been: “Where is the Lord?”

They did not ask it.

What the COULD have done - - was step back for JUST a minute.

What they COULD have done - - was be sure they had the bigger picture right.

And THEN - - get down to the hard work - - of day to day living.

And maybe - - we can learn from their mistake.

Chapter 2 of the book of Jeremiah begins with God remembering.

Jeremiah describes God remembering the innocence of Israel.

Israel is compared to a baby.

An innocent baby - - who is claimed by God's love.

But THEN - - Israel built their OWN kind of world - - it says.

The baby - - GREW UP.

Graduated from Junior High.

Israel became - - a GREATER nation.

And AS they were building themselves up - - the FORGOT.

They forgot to ask: where is the Lord?

And SO - - God's JUDGMENT is ON them in chapter 2.

Jeremiah judges Israel - - not SO much for doing the WORNG thing.

But for NOT doing - - the RIGHT thing.

We ALL do the WRONG thing from time to time.

Right?

Well THEN - - when we do - - HOPEFULLY we realize it - - and repent.

Hopefully we realize our mistakes and try to change.

Hopefully we ask for - - and GIVE - - forgiveness.

But have we?

Have we sometimes NOT wanted to acknowledge our mistakes?

Have we NOT wanted to do the RIGHT thing?

Because it was difficult?

Not really TRIED to listen?

Have we NOT tended to someone in need?

Have we NOT tried - - to figure out the RIGHT questions - -

- - the ones that REALLY needed to be asked?

In Luke's gospel - - in the NEW Testament - - a leader of the synagogue is upset with Jesus - - because he is SURE he is right.

He is SURE he KNOWS the right answer.

The scene begins - - as Jesus comes into the temple...

It is the Sabbath.

Jesus wants to be alone in prayer.

And then - - in the midst of his devotions he sees a woman in need.

It's like Jesus thinks:

“What good are my prayers - - if I don't help people in need?”

Thoughts and prayers...

If my prayers don't lead to healing - - and helping - - what then?

THAT - - is the RIGHT question!

BUT - - the leader of the synagogue doesn't think so.

The leader asks THIS question instead:

“Aren't there 6 days on which to work?”

“And isn't THIS day the 7th or Sabbath day?”

“Shouldn't you abide by THESE rules?”

BUT - - these are NOT the right questions.

Jesus then asks a question:

“Don't you untie your horses on the Sabbath to drink?”

Shouldn't you - - supposed people of faith - - have as much concern for a woman in need - - as you do for your horse - - whatever day it is?

Of COURSE you should!

So Jesus says to this ruler.

And THEN Jesus HEALS her.

The conflict in the story - - is partly about communication.

Communication - - and agreement - - about what is REALLY important.

Before we go charging ahead - - with the day to day things - - we need to get CLEAR about the bigger things - - and what is REALLY important.

What is the bigger picture?

What are the right questions?

Where is the Lord?

Answer: Wherever there is someone in need - - or in pain.

Wherever there is a woman - - who has been bent over for 18 years.

And when the WEIGHT is lifted - - she stands up and looks Jesus in the face for the first time in years. / THERE is the Lord! / THERE!

Where? / There.

And it doesn't MATTER what DAY it is.

Which is NOT to say there should NOT be a Sabbath.

But the SABBATH - - should be ABOUT HEALING.

Healing is not secondary - - everyday - - human work.

Healing - - is God's work.

Healing - - is the HEART of our faith.

As I think about my healing process over the past year it is clear to me.

As we heal in physical ways - - we see more clearly - - how God heals un in all kinds of ways - - emotionally and spiritually. / God WANTS to do this.

But sometimes we stand in the way - - or we resist it.

Or we just don't see it.

In order for there to be healing - - we have to SEE the PAIN.

In order for there to be healing - - we have to TALK about the needs.

In order for there to be healing - - we have to COMMUNICATE.

With each other - - and with God.

In order for there to be GOOD answers - - -

We have to ask...

...the RIGHT questions.

Let's take an example from everyday life:

This is from a BOOK called, "You Just Don't Understand Me"

A man and a woman are riding in a car. / The woman asks:

"DO YOU want to stop for something to EAT?"

The man says, "No" - - and they drive home.

Later at home - - the woman is UPSET.

Why did he just DRIVE home - - and ignore her question?

He says - - he didn't ignore the question - - he answered it.

He said no - - and drove home.

She's upset because her question was an attempt to INCLUDE him in a conversation about their mutual decision.

He's upset because it feels to him like she's playing mind games.

But - he didn't ask the right question in response - - which would have been:

“Well - - do YOU want to stop for something to eat - - dear?”

And then they could have had a conversation - - and communicated.

Well - - whatever happens to our friends - - my hope for the church is this:

In a world where people don't often try to listen to each other - - we would.

In a world where the needs of others are often ignored - - we would not.

Rather than try to prove we are right - - we would try to figure out what's wrong.

Life IS full of TOUGH questions.

Together - - maybe - - we can help shape some NEW answers.

For the church to thrive these days - - I believe - - we might have to put our effort into asking some NEW questions.

Why are we here - - as a church? That's a question.

What REALLY IS - - our purpose - - as a community of faith?

We are here to BE God's people. / We are here - - to follow Jesus.

We are here - - on the Sabbath - - to bear witness - -

to the one who broke the Sabbath rules!

In order - - to bring - - healing.

So let's NOT START with our answers - - but with our questions.

And together - - let us seek - - God's leading - - for our lives.

Amen.