

St. John's UCC, Fredericksburg
October 14, 2012

**"Questions And Answers"
(Job 23:1-9, 16-17; Mark 10:17-31)**

I remember it so well. I just received the news that Ray Diener was murdered. As I parked outside Jean's house, I quickly realized that seminary didn't prepare me for this....I didn't know the answers to the questions I knew Jean was going to ask me. How would I respond? Would I do more harm than any good? As I entered her home, I found Jean on the floor in tears....I expected this. Jean asked some faith questions, which I also expected. I did not try to give her answers.....because I didn't know the answers! What I could do is try to provide some comfort and assure that it was ok to ask those questions for God hears our questions! Unfortunately, there seems to be a mentality that as people of faith we have it altogether...we are to know all of the answers! But that is not the case. We have our questions.....sometimes we get some answers to those questions.....sometimes those answers are unexpected answers....at other times we don't get an answer, which leads to more questions. This is what it means to be a person of faith! This allows us to grow in the faith.

We find Job asking those tough questions. Last week we were introduced to Job and the unfortunate circumstances that he faced as he lost his property...his children...and his body was covered with sores. Job suffered. He continued to be a pious man....he did not curse God. Job is joined by three friends who first mourn in silence with him and then they have a conversation with him. The striking thing about this is that when he needed friends the most, he got theologians who try to

make sense of it all by saying that Job is suffering do to his sins. This happens all the time. I have seen pastors do this during times of crisis and it has done more damage than good!

Job is now crying out in misery and wants to plead his case before God, however, Job can't find God. He can't find the One who can hear his case and ultimately declare that Job is righteous. He feels abandoned by God....he feels abandoned by his friends. Job was seeking answers. He wanted to hear responses from his friends and from God. But he felt alone...he felt abandoned. The text provokes a lot of questions and few answers. As I said last week, maybe the point of Job is not to give us the answers....maybe what we learn today is that we realize that asking the questions is a part of our faith.

A man came to Jesus with a deep theological question..."what I do to inherit eternal life?" There is an assumption made by this man that in order to receive eternal life he must "do" something! Jesus responded to his question....Jesus reframed that question....Jesus simply loved him. The response or answer that Jesus gives us quite interesting....it is a set of commands: go....sell.....give....follow. The man is sell what he owns, give the money to the poor, and follow Christ. Will this man put aside his questions....his concern to receive eternal life and follow Christ? Will you?

Jesus is not adding anything to the plate, but rather he is telling us to take things away....to get rid of the things that we depend on and follow Christ. I am sure you don't like this response! You mean we must give up things....we must sell our possessions.....everything? You mean we must help the poor.....help those who are

in need.....who aren't as fortunate as we have been? You mean we must leave our comfort zones and follow Jesus? You've got to be kidding me. This is not the kind of answer we want to our big questions! "Yes" says Jesus, "that is what I am inviting you to do!"

Jesus is offering to us an abundant life. We come like Job or that man with deep questions about our faith. The answer that we receive is unexpected. We realize that the God we worship is too big to be defined....we can't have the nice, simple answers that are tied up with a bow! No, we are to change the way we live and to follow Christ.

I think the main reason why the church is in decline is that we haven't focused enough on discipleship. We have turned the church into a club....we are concerned about membership rather than disciples....followers of Christ. We don't help others to walk with Christ....to offer Christ to the world. There are people here today with the big questions....there are people out there who are asking the big questions. We don't have the answers, but we have Christ. If you have come here to receive easy answers, you may have come for the wrong reason. However, if you came to receive the love of God that is shown to us through Jesus Christ, then you came to the right place.

You are invited to offer your questions. You are then invited to put those questions and concerns to the side and follow Christ. I can assure you that discipleship....the abundant life that Christ offers us is far better than any answer one can give to our questions! Amen.