

## *“Asking the right questions”*

**November 11, 2007**

*Text: Psalm 145:1-9, Luke 20:27-40*

### I.

One of the things we learn immediately from this complicated and elusive reading from Luke 20 is that it's important to ask the right questions.

The questions put to Jesus in Luke 20 are trick questions, put to him by Jewish leaders—by chief priests, scribes and elders ... and in our specific reading this morning, the Sadducees.

The persons asking these questions—about where Jesus gets his authority ... or about whether or not it's lawful for the Jews to pay taxes to the emperor ... or about who belongs to whom in the resurrection—are not interested in new information or perspective on things. They're not trying to learn anything new.

Their sole intentions are sinister, right from the get go. Luke 20 comes on the shoulders of Jesus' outburst in the temple where, in an act of righteous indignation, he throws out the moneychangers, condemning their egregious abuse of sacred space.

All of this serves to further upset the pillars of Jewish leadership who have been looking for a way to condemn Jesus for some time now anyway. Jesus has become an increasingly serious thorn in their side.

And thus, the series of questions the intent of which is to entrap him ... to get him to say something sufficiently inflammatory so they can arrest him and hand him over to the Romans to be tried and executed.

Their questions are diversionary ... full of evil intent.

### II.

Check out the question in our reading from Luke!

According to Jewish law, if a man's brother dies, leaving a wife but no children, the man shall marry the widow and raise up children for his brother. That's the law. Now, if there were seven brothers and each married the widow and all seven died childless, after the woman herself dies, whose wife will she be in the resurrection ... for all seven had married her?

Obviously, this is a complicated question with no easy answer. But the point, is *does any body care?* Seven brothers ... all marrying the same widow (imagine, the poor widow) ... and—one by one—all of them dying, childless!

When would that ever happen? And then the question about *whose wife she would be in the resurrection* ... the Sadducees who asked the question don't believe in the resurrection anyway.

Clearly, their intentions are manipulative and full of evil designs. They're trying to trap Jesus with an utterly bogus question.

And we're reminded how it's important in life to ask the *right questions* in life. If not, as with Jesus, we can easily become diverted and find ourselves dealing with questions that miss the mark ... that nudge us off track.

All the time, in our lives, we become diverted from the larger questions that ought to concern us.

### III.

The *right questions* set the tone for the *right* conversation and dialogue. In other words, what *ought* we be talking about ... with regard to the quality of our lives ... and the ultimate meaning our lives have?

Think about your life! So often we find ourselves too caught up in the moment, in short-term concerns ... concerns that don't reflect the BIG PICTURE of our lives.

I'm thinking of the great Olympic athlete, **Marion Jones**, and how she got all caught up in illegal *performance enhancing* drug use ... which, of course, she initially denied ... but finally—because she's probably a good person underneath it all—she admitted to.

And now, what a mess her life is. And we wonder: *What was the thought process that led to all of this?* What was she thinking? Obviously, not about the long-term ... not about the BIG PICTURE ... not about possible consequences ...

With all the athletes caught in illegal, performance enhancing drug use ... with so many business persons caught in the snare of fraudulent scandal ... the immediate gratification impulses of our culture leap out at us, don't they?

In concerning ourselves with the *right questions*, sometimes we need to think about our lives from the end of our life back towards the present. This thought process gives us a more sobering, enlightened perspective on things.

#### IV.

For example, how do I want to feel ten, twenty, thirty or forty years from now? How do I want to feel about my life, about my primary relationships, when I'm in my last years ... looking back into my earlier life ... my relationship with family ... and friends ... with my community, with my total world??

If my only concern for today is how can I win or make money, whatever the cost, that spells out a whole different set of values ... and puts in place a whole different life-process.

A good question to ask ourselves is, *How would my behaviors change today if I began to measure my life from the vantage point of my last years?*

Speaking personally, I hope to live a few more decades, but I spend a lot of reflective moments considering how I want my children, for example, or you, my congregation ... how I want you to think of me.

I'm an intense person with no shortage of opinions on a whole range of things, and much of the time, I have to tone myself down ... just tone it down and think long-term. I can't tell you how many times I go into situations—meetings, conferences, competitions—whatever it is—telling myself ahead of time: *slow it down, now ... how do you want to feel when this is over?*

Asking ourselves the *right questions* makes a huge difference in our lives. It can seriously affect the way we think about things and thus, the decisions we make in life ... in particular with regard to the BIG PICTURE ... the long term.

#### V.

And pushing the point a little further, don't we as Americans, as the reigning, lone super power ... with all of our abundance and blessings ... don't we have the responsibility to lead the way in thinking long-term? Shouldn't we, more than any other people, set the *right* tone on issues that, clearly, affect the whole planet?

In our current global situation, we have a tremendous opportunity to shape the nature of conversation on just about anything. Again, the key is to be asking *the right questions*.

Take the debate on global warming. Let's tell the truth. The reason there has been so much resistance to concerns about global warming from the outset is that it's not profitable. In the short-term, it's not going to be good for the economy. That was the principle reason why the United States has one of the few nations not to sign the Kyoto Agreement.

Our national conversation on this needs to focus on the sort of *Inconvenient Truth* Al Gore emphasized in his fine movie by that name. We cannot afford to allow the naysayers to dictate the national conversation on this.

It seems like we're to the point where we know this. But we have a huge uphill battle to begin to seriously turn all of this around; in other words, to save our planet. The gradual melting of these icebergs in the Arctic and Antarctica is a gravely serious matter.

The right questions on global warming ought not be about short-term impact on the economy but about long-term impact ... about our sheer survival on the planet. The *right questions* are concerned about the BIG PICTURE.

## VI.

One of the over-arching flaws of modern American culture is our obsession with *immediate gratification*, in everything. In sports, with the incredible pressure to *win now*; and in the business community ... with the clamor for instant profits.

Again, much of this is about asking the *right questions*. The right question ought not be *What's in it for me?* ...or some version of, *Is this going to add to my income?* The *right question* ought to have to do with long-term consequences. *What's best for the planet ... for the wider community ... for the total team or the total family?*

The *right questions* are sensitive to long-term consequences. And shouldn't long-term consequences be a core concern we have in any decisions we make?

And more, still, isn't that the question that love asks? Doesn't love care about the quality of our primary relationships and the BIG PICTURE of our integrity human beings? And doesn't love care about whether or not the planet survives?

## VII.

In our Luke reading, part of the affirmation that Jesus makes is that God is *the God of the living* ... for to God, *all are alive*.

The *right question* emerging out of this, for all of us, in all that we do, is *Is it life-giving?* Whatever it is. *Is it life-giving?* God's purposes are always about giving life, preserving life, lifting up life ... in every situation.

In our relationships, what is the *life-giving* response? In global warming, what is the *life-giving* response?

And as we soak all of this in and reflect on the BIG PICTURE meaning of our lives, the words of wisdom of the **Psalmist** sound out to us:

*Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; his greatness is **unsearchable**.*

*The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The Lord is good ... and his compassion pours over all the earth.*

The question for us today—as individuals and as a nation—is, *Are we asking the right questions?* Are we asking the questions that consider the long-term consequences of our human situation? Are we asking the questions that look at the BIG PICTURE of our lives?

Is what we are doing today making things better? Is it lifting up love's purposes?

For God's graciousness and mercies are to the end of the earth. God's wisdom is **unsearchable**.

**All praise be unto God! Amen!**

Dr. Jeffrey E. Frantz  
Miami Lakes Congregational Church, *United Church of Christ*  
6701 Miami Lakeway South  
Miami Lakes, FL 33014  
On the web at [www.mlchurch.com](http://www.mlchurch.com)