

February 22, 2012

Questions for Lent and Easter

Ash Wednesday

The Life Question: What Do You Want?

John 1:35-42

Opening Words: John Simone Sr. once said, "*The key to wisdom is knowing all the right questions.*" I think he is right. Even without answers, questions have value. After all, what is a question? A question is nothing more than a request for more information. Only fools think they know everything. How many questions have you asked in the past week? How many questions have you asked in the past month? How many questions have you asked in the past year? Jesus asked twenty questions in the Gospel of John. Those questions are the foundation of my newest sermon series, *Questions for Lent and Easter*. Between this evening and Easter morning we are going to look at twelve different questions the Master asked. Each one is an excellent question because they are timeless.

This evening we look at the first question. This is the question: *what do you want?* Some have called it the life question. It is not a question about temporary needs or pleasures. It is a question about the basic things in life. It is an excellent question to ask on Ash Wednesday. May God give you ears to hear this question in John 1:35-42. Let me call this message *The Life Question: What Do You Want?*

John 1:35-42 35 The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. 36 When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" 37 When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. 38 Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?" They said, "Rabbi" (which means "Teacher"), "where are you staying?" 39 "Come," he replied, "and you will see." So they went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him. It was about four in the afternoon. 40 Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. 41 The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). 42 And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter).

One of the great portraits in the world today is Rembrandt's *The Prodigal Returns*. It is based on Luke 15, the story of the lost son. You know that story. A father had two sons. The younger brother went to the father and asked for his share of the inheritance before the father's death. The father gave it to him and the rest is history. He had a wild time and wasted all the money. In time, he hits rock bottom and returns home. The father is thrilled! The father welcomes him

back and throws a big party. Everyone is happy, except the older son. He doesn't understand. There is not an ounce of love for his little brother. *The Prodigal's Return* is Rembrandt's interpretation of that family reunion. The older son glares at the father. The younger son can't even look at the father.

The Prodigal's Return speaks to our world today because it represents two massive groups that exist in our world. The first group is filled with people who think they are perfect. They have done nothing wrong; they have done everything right. They do not need any help. They are so lost they don't even know it. Do you know of anyone who thinks they are perfect? Do you know of anyone who is part of the second group? They will admit to their imperfections. They have messed up their lives and they are looking for a second chance. They are asking for help. Does anyone here want a second chance to get it right? Lent exists for that second group of people. Lent is a time to ask God for help. If you need a little help say, "**Amen!**" Let us look at the scripture lesson together.

We are in the very first chapter of John. It is early in Jesus' ministry. It is so early in his ministry that Jesus is alone. He doesn't have a single disciple. However, that is about to change. You heard the story. According to the text, Jesus is passing by John the Baptist with two of his disciples. One of John's disciples is Andrew; the other is unknown. John recognizes Jesus and identifies him as the Lamb of God. That little phrase is important because it means John understood the divine plan. John knows Jesus will die as the perfect sacrifice. With that identification the two disciples leave John and begin to follow Jesus. If you use your sanctified imagination you can see them. Jesus is in the lead and the disciples are following close behind. They can see the back of his head but they can not see his face. Jesus knew they were following him. Maybe Jesus saw them following him? Maybe Jesus felt them following? Maybe Jesus heard them following him? Verse 38 is key. It says Jesus turned and looked at them. It was the first time they saw in face. The Master asked them a question that each one of us has to answer, *what do you want?*

What are you looking for from Jesus this evening?

1. Forgiveness
2. Hope
3. Peace
4. Purpose
5. Security
6. Salvation

There can be many answers to that question. How do you answer the question?
What do you want?

What did the disciples want from Jesus? I am a simple person and I think the

answer is simple. I think the disciples just wanted to see Jesus' face. They wanted to see what this "lamb of God" looked like. Let me state the obvious. Looking into someone's face is very important. We do not speak of any other body part in that way. No one cares about what your elbow looks like. Do one cares about what the ball of your foot looks like. Looking into someone's face is different. Is there anyone here who would like to see the face of God? And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"

What do you see when you look at your own face? We live in a society where looks are important. That is why there is a mirror in every bathroom. When you pass a mirror what do you see? Perhaps, this is a better question. Do you like what you see? Do you see too much gray hair? Do you see lines and wrinkles? Do you see more than one chin or a bugling waste line? Do you see a big nose and yellow teeth? What do you see when you look in the mirror? What do you see when you look at your own face?

What do you think God sees when he looks at you? God doesn't care about your physical body. God is more concerned with the condition of your heart. God is looking at the real you. God wants to know what really motivates you. Are you living just to *make* as much money as possible? Are you living to *save* as much money as possible? Are you living just to make yourself happy? Are you satisfied with the person you have become? How willing are you to get involved in solving the world's problems? How large of a part is Jesus in your life? Or do you just use Jesus to support your opinions? What do you think God sees when he looks at you? Lent is a time to look to God for help. And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"

Your Face: When I was in High School one of my best friends was a guy by the name of Dave Siegel. Dave was just brilliant. He took college classes in high school and was half way to his bachelor's degree at high school graduation. His specialty was mathematics. In time, he received some advanced degree in engineering from Carnegie Mellon University. Today, Dave lives in California and makes a generous salary. However, what I remember most about Dave Siegel was his driving. He was the worst driver I have ever known. His driving record was so horrible that the family insurance man said one more accident for Dave and he would be forced to cancel the family policy. You can guess what is about to come.

One summer night in 1974 Dave had all his friends in his father's Chevy Suburban. There were about six of us in the Suburban driving through the east side of Warren. The road was starting to wind but Dave kept driving straight. A SLOW CHILDREN sign jumped in front of us and Dave drove through this guy's lawn. The Suburban and the sign were not damaged but the gentleman's lawn was a mess. It was for that reason that the gentleman called the police. A few

minutes later the police appeared. The six of us took turns sitting in the back seat of the cruiser telling the officer what we remembered. When the policeman finished talking to us he looked at Dave and said, "Son, I am going to have to call your father." When the policeman walked away Dave looked at me and said, "Stan is going to kill me." (Stan was his father's first name and what we called him behind his back.)

God's Face Several minutes later Stan appeared in his racy green Ford Torero. Dave walked up to his dad and couldn't even look at him in the face. He kept his eyes down. Stan looked at his son and asked a single question. He did not ask, "Do you know what this will cost?" He did not ask, "How much damage was done?" He asked, "Was anyone hurt?" He put his hand on Dave's shoulder and they went to talk to the homeowner together. It wasn't just Stan Siegel's face I saw that evening. I saw the face of God, a face of grace who was willing to help. Lent is the season for those who need God's help. And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**" Let me end with a quick story.

A pastor in Beirut was preparing to serve communion one Ash Wednesday when a local prostitute walked into the sanctuary. It was a stressful moment because some of the men in the congregation had known her professionally. The wives of those men had suspected it for years. At the last second the pastor decided to call the people to take communion. He decided to serve each one individually. When he got to the prostitute she couldn't even look at the pastor. She kept her face down. He asked her, "Will you look at me?" He took his hand and raised her face so they were looking eye to eye. The pastor looked at the prostitute and gave her the elements. He looked at her and said, "You are a child of God!" Years later, that prostitute said, "Those words changed her life." It was only then that she realized Jesus did not come to condemn her. Jesus came to help her. Lent is a season for those who need God's help. Is there anyone here this evening that needs God's help?