

## Sermon for Proper 7 Year B

### Questions Propel our Faith Journey

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[Job 38:1-11](#); [Psalm 107:1-3, 23-32](#); [2 Corinthians 6:1-13](#); [Mark 4:35-41](#)

Patrick Overton reflects in his poem “Faith”:

“When you come to the edge of all the light you have  
And take the first step into the darkness of the unknown,  
You must believe one of two things will happen:  
There will be something solid for you to stand upon,  
or you will be taught how to fly.”

Many times in our lives we face the unknown, the uncertainty of a future, an outcome, we cannot see. And what we have to hold onto in those moments is our faith that God is with us: that God will be our solid rock to stand on, or that we will be taught to fly.

Today’s Old Testament lesson shows us what this looks like, with the steadfast faithfulness and absolute conviction of Job in the face of excruciating darkness. We see this, too, in the gospel lesson, with the new understanding of the disciples as Jesus calms the wind and sea.

Both stories illustrate faith. Neither story is that simple. Each story includes a crucial question.

“Who do you think you are?” God asks Job. “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me! Who determined its measurements? Surely you know!” God demands of Job: “Who do you think you are?!”

“Who is this?” the disciples ask each other as the waves roll, the winds roar, and their boat pitches in the sea. “Who is this,” they ask about Jesus when he calms the storm, “that even the wind and the sea obey him?”

We have two stories of faith, two questions. God asks Job: Who are you? The disciples ask of Jesus: Who is he?

If we can answer these two questions, we can describe our faith and equip ourselves for those times that will come: when we will be required to step off into the darkness of the unknown.

Who are you? Who is God for you?

Lots of people would be happy to answer your questions for you, but what they will give you are their answers. As much as we might not like others telling us what we must believe and who we are as Christians, it is the churches that are doing this that are experiencing booming success. The mega-churches, which are thriving, offer answers as bait. “We will tell you what to believe, how to live. There is no need to bother with seeking and searching, with the messiness of doubt. We have the truth and we will give it to you.”

Does this sound familiar? In an ever-changing world fraught with uncertainty and stress, this can be very seductive. It’s a rare security, a comforting assurance. Tidy.

But is it faith? Can answers given to you by someone else stand on that brink of darkness, looking into the unknown?

The author Frederick Beuchner once observed that doubt is – and perhaps it is also fair to say questions are – “the ants in the pants of faith.”

Get a visual on that: ants in the pants. There is no way you can sit still, relax, remain calm. The adventure of faith requires energy and courage. It requires movement. If you have all the answers, you may as well go to sleep, because your work is done. But if you have questions – “ants in your pants” – then the journey continues. You must seek, you must search, you must move.

People often look to the Bible for answers, and many claim to find them there. “The Bible says it, I believe it, that settles it.” Have you seen that bumper sticker? But the Bible is not a proof-text document, a finished, static idea. God is not dead, or asleep.

We can look to the Bible, instead, for questions.

God asks, in the Garden of Eden: Adam, Eve, where are you?

Cain asks: What? Am I my brother’s keeper?

The psalms lament: How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?

John the Baptist asks: Are you the one who is to come?

Jesus asks Peter: Who do you say I am?

Pilate asks Jesus: What is truth?

The apostle Paul asks: What can separate us from the love of God?

It is the questions that are alive, the questions that describe what we believe, the questions that continue the conversation with God.

Consider one of our more popular television game shows, “Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?” It is the answers that win the prize. The right answer, chosen from four possibilities. You can even get help in narrowing it down to two possible answers, or involving a friend, to get just the right one.

There is something in us that likes the adventure of questions, yet clings to the security of answers when we are facing a frightening unknown. But we are often faced with questions that demand our response without really having clear answers. Medical technology, for example, forces us into questions no one should have to address. And while we’re grateful for the advances in healthcare, it’s tough being caught in the dilemma of a difficult decision with little guidance but our faith in God. Do you have the treatment in a limited hope of prolonging life? Or do you live the life you’re given, let nature take its course? When do you pull the plug on someone? What about organ donation? Questions like these are now commonplace, as so many of us have learned.

Such questions challenge us to think big, to think beyond, to examine our innermost selves, to involve God. Such questions require us to ask, “Who am I?” and “Who is God?”

Such questions are life- and faith-changing. Look at Job. Look at the disciples. They were each and all forever changed, forever clarified, by the questions.

Think of a time in your life when you faced a question, the answer to which changed the direction of your life forever. “Will you marry me?” “What shall we tell her?” “How shall we break the news?” “Do we continue treatment?” “Where do you want to live?” “What do you want to study?”

The way we answer these questions forever influences our knowledge of ourselves and our understanding of God.

We are not a particularly noble people. Our faith is no more spectacular than anyone else's. But in an instance of grappling with an unanswerable question in an imperfect world, perhaps some of us might choose a continuing question over a definitive answer – to live in the unknown, trusting God, instead of settling the issue then and there.

Living with the questions is often difficult. There can be much ambiguity, lots of loose ends. But as difficult as it can be to live in the ambiguity of questions, trusting that God will be with us at that edge between light and darkness, we may find that standing in the unknown with God brings more blessing than the imagination can dream of.

The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian church that, in Jesus, every one of God's promises is a yes. Gospel musicians, taking inspiration from this scripture passage, sing: "Find your YES in him." Whatever questions confront us, may we trust God to be our answer.

Remember Overton's poem:

"When you come to the edge of all the light you have  
And take the first step into the darkness of the unknown,  
You must believe one of two things will happen:  
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Every journey brings blessings. Journeys don't begin with answers, only with questions, whether it's a journey to the next state or a journey of faith.

Who do you think you are? Who is this who calms the wind and sea?

Blessings to you on your journey.

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