

Is the Lord Among Us?
Sixteenth Sunday After Pentecost
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Paige Convis

If you have spent any time with young children. You know that they love to ask questions. I do a lot of childcare, and I experience a lot of questions. I think my favorite from this week, was: Is the World going to end soon? This one left me quite speechless and unsure how to answer a 1st grader without freaking them out completely, but usually the questions are mundane and easy to answer. Why is the sky blue? Does everybody sleep? Is it time for bed(oh wait, that is never a question...) But questions are important. It is how we learn and develop our knowledge and thoughts.

We question all sorts of things. And some people are better at asking questions than others. I always envy the people who can ask good questions of people, and of books that they read, and about anything really.

Asking questions is a skill.

We have been reading through the story of Exodus in the lectionary these past few weeks.

Which is full of questions.

Let us consider the Israelites questions...

How long will we be in slavery?

Who will lead us?

Will Pharaoh let us go?

How will God deliver us?

What is it?

And this week: Why did you plop us in the desert? Can Moses really lead us? Can we have a drink? Is the Lord among us?

Now some questions are good, but questioning God's presence! Isn't there a rule about that somewhere? We should never question God's presence, right?

I don't think so—I don't think we need to make a move to that. I think often the Israelites are frowned upon in this story of doubting God, that people of good faith shouldn't do that.

But questions are good, it is how we learn and grow.

When something doesn't make sense, like why are we in the desert, dying of thirst, when we ate so well in Egypt. We should ask questions!

Instead of looking down on the Israelites for their lack of faith, I like to appreciate the picture the Israelites paint, a beautiful picture of the accurate, raw realness of the human experience. Full of triumphs and failures, full of goodness, and full of sadness, with times of thirst and hunger, and times of good drink and marvelous food.

Life is filled with so many senseless events. Mindless tragedies fill our newspapers every day--airplane crashes, the murder of innocent children, insane terrorism, natural disasters. And much in our own lives seems without purpose or meaning--like a rainstorm on a picnic day, a bad cold when we are having a party, a handicapped child, the early death of a parent or spouse, a broken marriage, a car that won't start in the morning, the disloyalty of friends and envy of neighbors. This list goes on... and

We are often left to wonder why such things happen. Is there any point and purpose behind them? Are we alone in a universe that cares anything about us? Is the Lord among us, or not?

So that question of God's presence of those thirsty Israelites does not remain in the pages of the Old Testament. It is a question we personally own and ask as well.

But Are we silly to question? Maybe it is foolishness to question God. So let's say we make it a rule—no more questioning God...

Then we might live our lives thinking that our faith is only about what we want God to do for us; how we want God to conform to our needs, our necessities in ways that make sense to us, and occur on our timetable. We would measure God's faithfulness in terms of God's ability to deliver the goods. God does seem faithful when we are getting what we want. If we couldn't question God we would certainly might feel rooted in faith and encouraged (there would be no room for doubts..) as long as results are immediate, and things are good.

But I have feeling there would be a whole world of rule breakers when the long pauses of silence and stillness when darkness descends and there is no response from Heaven. What happens when the promotion doesn't come or we lose the championship game or the diagnosis is cancer or the marriage cannot be saved or your child will never get well or you are in the wilderness without a water fountain in sight? Surely we would ask again-- "Is the Lord among us or not?"

We need to leave room for the questions

There isn't room in this crazy life to have rules about no questions.

I used to believe that Christians were so privileged that we lived in the light of God's presence most of the time with only visits of spiritual darkness or brief wilderness wanderings or seasons of doubt or however else best you describe it for yourself.

I am, however, changing my mind and wondering about just the opposite. It seems to me that our spiritual lives are more characterized by living in a darkness that is so rich that we can almost taste it. It is a darkness that surrounds and overwhelms and threatens us.

Yet in that darkness, there are moments where glimpses of God's glory are so intensely bright that they blind our eyes with light. These glimpses of glory hint of a deeper joy and peace that represent more than anything we have yet known. They are glimpses of grace that shine so bright, we can't ignore them.

So in amidst all the darkness... Where is the Light?

And it is in Jesus Christ, the light of the world that this glory of God is most revealed to us. The Jesus, that Paul describes to us in Philippians as the one

Who emptied himself and humbled himself.

The one who God also highly exalted

and gave him the name

that is above every name,

¹⁰ so that at the name of this Jesus

every knee should bend,

in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

¹¹ and every tongue should confess

that Jesus Christ is Lord,

to the glory of God the Father.

So

Is God among us?

If we were searching for the answer, the answer is yes! God is indeed among us, in Jesus Christ by the power of God's Holy Spirit.

Although Jesus is this light in our darkness.

Christ knows darkness also. The pain of this world impacted him. Questions were a part of his world too...

He too cried out—My God, My God why have you forsaken me?

Is God among us?

We can take sure hope that God is among us, we worship a God who provides the thirsty with a drink and the hungry with something to eat. We know a God, that although can at times seem distant, and not at all in control of all the crud happening here. God is present to us in this Good book, in the narratives that shape and form us and teach us how we might live, God is present in the church gathered here and on every corner of this world and in the sacraments of water and meal. We know a God that comes to us in

our questions, in our brokenness and in our joy and rejoicing. We know a God that sent a son, that humbled himself, died and rose again for the new creation of this world.

So, what do we do? We live human lives, being faithful loving God and neighbor. All of it-- The good the bad the ugly

We question, because we know that God will answer us, eventually like God did the Israelites—with a drink of water, with an encouraging word from a friend, with healing either on this side of heaven or the other.

We can question because we know that God's presence never really leaves. That in God's weird timing we will be able to get our drink from the rock too. Because when we ask, God answers.

God are you among us?

Yes, in Jesus Christ, in whom all authority in heaven and on earth have been given.

God is among us.

Thanks be to God. Amen