

Job 38:1-11  
Mark 4:35-41  
June 23, 2024

## Questions

Bear with me while I make an advertisement this morning. On Sunday evening, July 14, we will gather here in the sanctuary for the first of two hymn sings that we will share this summer. The focus will be the hymns of Isaac Watts, who was an important person in what is generally known in America as the First Great Awakening, in the first half of the eighteenth century, both in England and here in America.

We will learn about the biography of Isaac Watts and something of the inspiration for and backstory of the hymns he wrote, such hymns as:

O God, Our Help in Ages Past  
We're Marching to Zion  
When I Survey the Wondrous Cross,  
Alas, and Did My Savior Bleed, and others.

Later, in August (the 11th), there will be a second hymn sing that will focus on the hymns of Fanny Crosby, a nineteenth century American song writer. More will be said about her later. In between, on July 28th, Richard and Laura Brown have graciously invited us to their home for a church picnic.

There is time enough for details later, but we are thankful for these opportunities for growth and worship and fellowship during these summer months.

I hope you will join us. There, I have done it, made an advertisement for our summer activities.

It has always been the case that some people have questioned the conditions of their existence on earth. Why are we here? Why is life short? Does there have to be pain? Why evil? What is the meaning of it all? *Is there* meaning? More than any other facet of life, it is religion that has sought to answer these questions.

Some might suggest that the medical profession is concerned as well with what is essentially theology, but since in the end everyone dies, the answers of science are unsatisfactory. We will stick to theology. We have two readings for our consideration this morning. In both of today's readings, we find variations on these questions.

In the gospel reading, there is the well-known story of the Stilling of the Storm. Jesus and his companions are in a boat out on the lake known as the Sea of Galilee. The lake's temper along with their sea-faring technology could occasionally team up to produce a potentially dangerous situation. Sailors could be overwhelmed, boats could sink, lives lost, people questioning the terms of earthly life.

There was a storm. In the midst of it all Jesus *slept*. Apparently his ability to sleep was related to his faith, which calmed him. His companions, on the other hand, panicked. They questioned Jesus, even going so far as to question whether he cared if they lived or died.

The answer they received came in the form of a wonder of nature. It is true that they were chided, “. . . O ye of little faith,” but the primary answer came in a miracle. “Quiet,” he said to the sea, “be still.” Then the wind died down and everything became calm. They marveled.

I am sure that everyone is familiar with the story of Job, a righteous man by every reckoning, who suffered great loss; the loss of his family, his fortune, and his health, everything but his life, all at the hands of an accuser who claimed his faithfulness and righteousness were based solely on his experience of life’s goodness and pleasure. Give him enough trouble and he will have trouble enough with faithfulness.

Job did not renounce God, but he did ask the question about divine justice. The Book of Job is much longer than the little story in the Gospel of Mark. It has forty-two chapters in all, and it is the thirty-eighth chapter before God speaks up with any kind of an answer. And the answer is not really an answer at all. It is an interrogation.

“Who is this that darkens my counsel by words without knowledge. Brace yourself like a man, *I will question you, and you shall answer me?*” Jesus had done the same, “*Why do you doubt?*” he questioned his disciples, and all of us.

As is widely known, the meaning of the word, “gospel,” is, “good news.” That God has freely chosen to create the world and to give life, and eternal life, to

those who are unable to attain it themselves and furthermore, are undeserving, *is a terrific message*; it is a message of liberation and healing, mercy and compassion; it is a message primarily of *love*.

Because, however, of the suffering that characterizes much of life, and of the condition of the world, people have been ever finding ways to question it. People seem everlastingly creative and ingenious in finding ways to turn the good news bad. And then question God about it.

Life is a storm. “Man,” is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward,” is a particularly Jobean (if I can be allowed to invent a word) way of putting it. No matter the good and wonderful experiences of life, people are always aware of their vulnerability; to sin, to pain and suffering, to economic collapse, to illness, and finally to death.

The good news, however, is not just that along the way there are many good and wonderful things as well, but that, along the way, God is present to us. There is no boat on the stormy sea that one can be in without Jesus there too.

And this is true even if he is unrecognized, or if it seems like he is sleeping. As a matter of fact, the message of the gospel *is* that whether we see him or not, Jesus is with us in every situation up to *and* including death, which has been overcome. God was there all along with Job and his friends.

So neither the questions we ask nor the ones that are asked of us, come to us in our vulnerability, our weakness, our doubt; but from God's glory and majestic power and love. And in the end it is not we who question God, but God who questions us.

And what is asked of us? Not just as Christian believers, but as human beings, what is asked of everyone in their humanity?

*Faithfulness in the midst of the storm.* Without God's help, even just a little faithfulness may stretch us beyond our capacity. But, "Thanks be to God," we are not without God's help. A little faith goes a long way.

And in that faithfulness, it is asked of us everything that is associated with what has been called righteousness, a stuffy theological word, but one so packed with meaning that it is better to retain rather than discard it, not to earn what can not be earned, but because we have received what has been given;

morality, high ethics, honesty and truthfulness, honor and integrity, compassion and empathy towards others, justice and mercy. And these also are beyond us without God's help, but thanks be to God through Our Lord Jesus Christ, we are not without God's help. This is the message of the gospel, the good news.

And beyond even that, to allow ourselves to experience the beautiful in life, life as beautiful; not just the wonderful aspects of earthly life, "humanity is born to wonder and beauty . . . , but also the beauty of

the eternal, heavenly realm, which is, of course, both within our midst and beyond our reach without God's help. Thanks be to God, through Our Lord Jesus Christ, we are . . . not without God's help. After all, Jesus was right there in the boat with them.

So go ahead and ask the questions of God that are on your heart and in your mind, even if they are hard questions, but ask them faithfully; and be ready for the questions from God directed to us, that in the faith that grounds you, even if it is only a little faith, you will know God's presence in every time, place, and situation; and by God's grace, be found faithful.

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