

Core Strength sermon series
Curiosity
Nov. 9, 2025
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I have questions. Do you have questions? I bet you do. Some of my questions are simple. Why can't I get the USB plug to fit the first time? Why did they make a fourth Indiana Jones movie? Why do roads in Lexington change names so many times? Why do donuts taste so good? Yes, I wrote this sermon at North Lime on Friday morning. I don't know about you, but my day is filled with these kinds of questions.

Of course, there are more serious questions that bubble just below the surface. Why do humans seem so determined to kill each other? Why don't we value our diversity more? Why don't we do a better job of taking care of the most vulnerable in society? Is the earth going to survive everything we are doing to it? Why can't the people who disagree with me see how wrong they are? I think the events and circumstances of our world compel us to ask these kinds of questions.

And then...there are the Questions. Capital Q. Why am I here? What is my purpose? Do I matter? Is there really a God? Is that God really love? Does that God love me? These aren't casual conversation questions. These are wake-you-up-in-the-middle-of-the-night questions. When I was a seminary student serving as an intern at a church, I had a member of the congregation ask me to lunch, and in a quiet voice, he started the conversation with, "I have some concerns." Realize that's not a minister's favorite thing to hear. It ranks right up there with, "Who picks these hymns, anyway?" He almost whispered, "I have some questions about the Bible. I don't know if I believe all of it." I assured him that he was not alone and I encouraged him to talk the senior minister, who was much better trained to handle these things. He said, "Oh, no, I can't tell this to a real minister! That's why I wanted to talk to you." I asked him why he wouldn't go to the senior minister and he said something that has always stuck with me: "I can't let anyone know I have questions."

As we continue our sermon series looking at the core values of our church, which were recently adopted, our value today is curiosity, which is simply the desire to know or learn something new, which we often do by asking questions. Asking questions. In a church. Is that OK? I mean, I have no problems asking questions like why do liquor stores have drive-through lanes. But spiritual questions? About God? Is it OK to ask questions, to express doubts, to challenge the words we read in the Bible or wonder about the practices of the church? A lot of us grew up in churches and households where the answer was an emphatic "No." God was to be worshipped and obeyed but never questioned. The answer to any question was, "God's ways are not our ways." End of discussion.

But that's not the example the Bible has set for us. If you have questions, you stand in a long line of famous people who didn't quite understand this whole faith thing. Abraham, Moses, Jacob, Job, all of the prophets – every one of them had serious questions they weren't afraid to ask directly to God. Like the prophet Habakkuk: "O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen? Or cry to you 'Violence!' and you will not save? Why do you make me see wrongdoing and look at trouble?" Or how about these lines from the psalm we read today, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?"

In the New Testament, Jesus is peppered with questions as he goes about his ministry. A lawyer tests Jesus by asking him, “Who is my neighbor?” and Jesus responds with a story about a foreign Samaritan man who demonstrates compassion and care. Other questions asked to Jesus carry the same kind of urgency: “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” “What is the greatest commandment?” “Are you the one who is to come?” “Can you change my water in wine, maybe a nice pinot noir or Savvy B?” OK, that last one may not be in there. The Bible is full of rich examples of people questioning Jesus to get a greater understanding of who he is.

And then there’s our scripture I read today. Paul is in Athens, the epicenter of pagan religion, surrounded by idols, and he’s bravely proclaiming the gospel. He’s debating the Stoics and the Epicureans, and at one point they invite him to the Areopagus, which is like City Hall, because, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? It sounds rather strange to us, so we would like to know what it means.” They were curious.

Somewhere along the way, curiosity went from being a necessary step of faith to a spiritual no-no. I think this had a lot less to do with God welcoming our questions and a whole lot more to do with the church not knowing how to answer them. When the Protestant Reformation put the Bible in the hands of the people, an amazing thing happened: they read it. And when they read it, they found that the God the church had been selling them was different than the God they read about in scripture. So, they started asking questions. Many of the most prominent question-askers were rewarded with excommunication or a backyard barbecue with them tied to the stake. The message? Don’t ask questions.

But ever since, people been reading the Bible, listening to sermons, going to Sunday School, and watching what’s happening around us in the world, and responding with “WTF?” which stands for “What the faith?” How do we reconcile what we know about God and what we see in the world? How do we make sense of starving children, genocide, holy wars, broken families, and pandemics in light of God’s promise of goodness and protection? This capricious, conflicted world compels us to cry out, “How long, O Lord?” Some people say we shouldn’t question God. I say, how can we claim to have faith and NOT have questions?

I believe the questions people are asking are indicative of a larger change going on in our culture, one that will determine the future of the church. People are hearing one thing from the church but are experiencing something quite different in real life. What should they believe? If the church has been telling people that God is all-powerful, and yet we see planes flying into buildings and children dying of hunger, we start to wonder: Is God all-powerful? And if so, why isn’t God doing something about this? These are the kinds of questions people are asking, and if the church doesn’t allow them to be asked, the church’s authority erodes and those folks will go somewhere else. And in our world of overwhelming choice, one of the options is to go nowhere. Is it OK to come to church with questions?

Absolutely. I believe curiosity is essential for a growing faith. Diana Butler Bass says our questions have less to do with doctrine – “What should I believe?” – and more to do with the experience of faith and life – “How am I to live?” For example, she writes that it’s one thing to ask, “Do you believe that Jesus was historically and scientifically raised from the dead?” It’s quite another to ask, “Do you trust in the resurrection?” People are wrestling with the hard questions, and for the church to tell them that they can’t ask those questions is a sure sign that we are out of touch with people’s lives and hearts. We as a church need to create space for curiosity, for people to ask their questions without fear of judgment.

I’ve seen this in action here at Crestwood, and it’s amazing to watch. I’ve sat in Sunday School classes as people have expressed doubts and in gatherings where guests have asked about

why we don't do infant baptisms or why we have women ministers and Elders. I've had email and text exchanges with people wanting to know where God is in the midst of their mess. And behind all of that is the fundamental question: Is it OK for me to ask questions? Can I be curious about my faith or do I need to be certain? This sounds strange to us and we'd like to know what it means.

I have good news for us here. To be a church that values curiosity does NOT mean we have to have the answers! And no, that doesn't mean you can just say, "Go ask Kory." Because, honestly, can any of us answer why bad things happen to good people or who really is our neighbor or what it truly means to love God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength? I know I can't. But I believe we are not called to provide pat answers; instead, we're called to give people the space and the community in which to ask the questions. Because I believe people will find that their questions and our questions are the same questions! We are wrestling with the same kind of knotty stuff they are, and they are not alone in wondering how what we hear on Sunday intersects with what we experience Monday through Saturday.

Ultimately, I believe Jesus is the answer to their questions, so it's our job to connect them with Jesus. Am I loved? Do people care? Will I be judged? Jesus answers those questions for us, and those answers are embodied by us in how we welcome people into this space, as they place their spiritual baggage alongside ours and say, "I have questions." As we sit next to them in the pews, as we pass them the communion trays, as we invite them to Sunday School, we are saying, "Yes. You are loved. You are welcome. You matter."

When we answer those basic questions, we create room for the deeper ones, questions about God's power and the existence of evil and why churches love committees. I don't know that we'll ever have answers to those on this side of Heaven. But I believe transformation is found, not in finding the answers, but in asking the questions. As Rainier Rilke says, "Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves. The point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer."

From biblical times until the present time, we have questions. How can we not? I believe our questions are answered for us each Sunday when we come into God's presence, when we are reminded of God's goodness, when we are welcomed into a community. Sometimes, during the course of the week, we forget those answers. And so we are welcomed back, welcomed again to the table, welcomed to bring all that is on our minds and hearts. We are invited to ask our questions, and then to experience the presence of Christ among us and within us, who walks with us as we seek to our answers.