

+In the Name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. Amen+

Let us take a few moments and ponder questions. We all ask them from the time we are old enough to be puzzled, want more information, or just make a request. Have you ever considered the vast array of them? There are the type that are looking an answer yet unknown, the ones that are seeking confirmation of assumptions already held, and there are the kind that are really statements just masked as inquiries—these can be really dangerous. “Don’t you think...”

Fritz Perls, the freewheeling psychologist from Big Sur, once commented, “beware of questions, they all have a hook at the end.” (meaning an I gotcha). The ancient Greeks loved the use of a question format known as a riddle, and employed them often in story and myth as a challenge or doorway a hero must traverse to find his/her destiny. Comedians and late night TV hosts use them to create humorous images sometimes in order to get to a more serious material and sometimes just for the fun of it. Did you ever watch The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson? He introduced a character known as ‘Carnac the Magnificent’ who would hold an envelope to his forehead in order to mysteriously discern its contents. He would give the answer, and a sidekick would then open the sleeve and read the question. For instance: “Hope Springs Eternal”—Q.-What is the motto of the UNC Football program? Or, “When Pigs Fly”—Q – When will the construction on I-85 be completed? There are so-called rhetorical questions, which are not really meant to garner a response, but to state the obvious. Occasionally they are followed by a brief silence and then DUH.

BUT, there are those times that call for something more than these ordinary interactions, and there are people who ask, often with simple ease and clarity those questions that penetrate to truth we would avoid. These moments and people are like a finger probing a taugth piece of cellophane or saran wrap. They leave the surface pushed and stretched, but not ruptured so that those who hear the questions have to consider and respond. These people are often experienced as bothersome, pushy, or downright annoying because they call us to consider what we would rather ignore. Jesus is one of those people and it finally cost him.

In St. Matthew’s version of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus not only is a sage teacher of truths; he is one who reveals through his sayings and even more his questions what is at the heart of a life of faith. When he says, “You cannot serve God and wealth-two masters” do you not find yourself wondering where you stand? This could easily be seen as a diatribe against wealth, but it isn’t. Nowhere in this text is the material world denigrated. It is put in perspective.

But then listen: “Is not life more than food, physical existence more than clothing?, or “Look at the birds...are you not of more value than they?”, “Why are you anxious?” Now let me come clean with you. I have been looking at this text for a couple of weeks trying to listen to it and anticipating what can be said for it to come to life. And honestly there are times when I want to respond to Jesus and say, “Are you kidding me?! Not be anxious?” I cannot shake the images of the victims of the flooding from Harvey and Irma or those in Mexico who are searching diligently for survivors of the earthquake that has created devastation. Human suffering is a daily present reality. Who among us that follow international events are not concerned about 2 world leaders behaving like children as they hurl insults which could lead to hurling more than words? I drive through my neighborhood and see signs saying, “Report suspicious activity, call...” It is very difficult not to sink into one of my favorite pastimes, worrying!!!

As if often the case, a more diligent and careful reading of Jesus is called for. Hearing him out of his context and intent rather than my own anxious concerns is what he is asking. “Notice he does not start with “do not worry/be anxious” but with seek first God. Jesus is not asking us to ignore or abandon our needs or the needs of those in the world that we can alleviate for some pious mystical insight. It is interesting that the word here for worry or anxiety in Greek (*merimnate*) means to have concern for—it is basically positive. It is when that concern *for* becomes total concern *about*, that we move from seeing the goodness of God behind everything and put ourselves as the center around which all life moves. We are not being called to abandon our lives or that of others, but we are being shown that becoming entrapped or owned by

our possessions or our desire for possessions is a form of spiritual imprisonment. A few years ago I sat in a courtroom in another state waiting for a case to be called up. Just prior to that a young man appeared before the judge and by his demeanor one could assume he was not particularly interested in the proceedings. It seems he has failed on numerous occasions to pay his child support, and was now facing accountability. I don't recall much about the dialogue except when he was asked about it he claimed to have paid what he owed. The judge asked for proof and the man said he hadn't brought his checkbook, but would see if he could send it later. The judge, running out of patience, made one more comment and the response he received was, "Yeah, Yeah". One nod to the bailiff and the handcuffs were on and he was being "escorted" to a cell. The judge commented, "Many times it is only when the click of the cell door is heard that people wake up." Sometimes I/We have to come to the realization of how deeply we are locked up with anxiety over possessions and perceived needs, so that we can see the freedom God grants us by being His children.

Remember how Jesus begins this conversation with us. It isn't about worrying but about a relationship with God whose view of economy is quite different from our world. God's care and concern is not limited by scarcity. When our second grandchild was born and they came to live with us we did not say, "Oh my, we only have this much love to give so we will now be required to halve what we gave the first one so the second can get a little. That love multiplied beyond our reckoning. If we of such meagre faith and perspective do that, how much more does the one we call Father offer us?! Discovering that money or what we own always leaves us wanting something more is actually a gift of grace...it is what Jesus' questions are intended to bring forth. That recognition allows us to see what really matters in this life—The immeasurable love God has for us and all creation.

There are a multitude of images of need and scarcity available to us. I read somewhere recently about a parish that asks people to bring images of plenty so that a real picture of God's grace can be seen. This week while sitting on my deck, which is full of flowers and herbs, I noticed the parsley, both flat leaf and curly had stalks rising up without leaves. Alarmed, I began to look about for the culprit(s) when I spotted 2 black swallowtail caterpillars munching away. Now I have enough parsley to feed all of you and then some!! My first inclination was to get rid of those thieves! But then, what beauty they have and will bring...is there not enough...What is enough? God provides! Amen+