

Lenten Curiosity

John 3:14-21

INTRO:

We are born wanting to *know* why, wanting to *know* more, wanting to *be* more, full of questions. As we grow, we lose our youthful, childlike curiosity. Jesus patiently hears our questions and creatively answers them. Jesus is also the answer to our deepest questions. In Jesus, the one who is a sign of God's great love for the world, all of our deepest questions are answered. Let's try to regain some of that *curiosity* this Lenten season. Some Lenten Curiosity.

ME:

I'm just *curious*, **how are you doing this morning?** Turn to your neighbor and ask them how they are doing. Be sure to listen to their answer. Then they will ask you the same question, and I'd like you to be sure they listen to their answer too.

YOU:

So, did they listen as you shared? And... did you listen as they answered? It is good to really connect with others, **isn't it?** Let's see if God will help us rediscover our sense of curiosity this morning:

GOD:

John 3:14 And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

17 “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. 18 Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. 19 And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. 20 For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. 21 But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”

WE:

I am *curious* as to why this passage assigned to this week’s lectionary begins after the wonderfully *curious* story of Nicodemus in the first 13 verses of this chapter! You may not be as *curious* as me about all this. Especially if you emerge listening to the unsettling story in the Hebrew Bible Reading.

Do you you agree that the lectionary’s division of today’s Gospel is strange.

What is the Lectionary, you ask? The Lectionary is an assigned schedule

of readings/passages from the Bible that are used both in daily worship and Sunday worship in many Christian Churches. The use of a lectionary as a focus for worship ensures that a congregation, over time, will hear the various voices and lessons of Scripture and not just the favorite texts of the pastor. Use of the Lectionary allows a congregation to learn from the whole of Scripture, invites us to consider how multi-layered and rich the message of Scripture is, and prevents us from focusing only on the messages of Scripture with which we are comfortable and avoid the challenge that Scripture brings. I'm curious, **is the Bible challenging to you? If it is, WHY do you think that is? If it is NOT challenging to you, WHY do you think THAT is? And if you never find it challenging, what is it you are reading? I'm talking about the Bible, not Readers Digest!** The Bible can be challenging, but we should try to never give up on it. Keep reading and allow God to reveal himself to you as you do. Back to the curiosity of today's reading!

Limiting the reading to verses 14 to 21 of John 3 disconnects us from the story of Jesus and Nicodemus in the early verses of the 3rd chapter and makes today's Gospel a bit incomprehensible. Verse 14 does make reference to the first lesson from Numbers, but the full force of the text demands some reference to the context, all the way back to John 3:1. It is typical of John to begin with some historical event, such as Jesus's night meeting with Nicodemus, present the event as a sign, then lead to a pro-

nouncement. Today, in verses 14 to 21 we are given the pronouncement without the preceding event and sign. The context is a nighttime visit by Nicodemus, an apparently respected, knowledgeable **“teacher of Israel.”** Nicodemus begins by speaking of what **“we know.”** Mature, experienced, educated people tend to be full of what they know, or at least assuredly think they know. Then, in conversation with Jesus, Nicodemus is quickly moved to a series of questions. **“How is it possible?”** is his repeated refrain. Jesus is taking the self-assured teacher into a whole new realm of possibility, a new way of thinking, of understanding the world and defining his life. **How is it possible?** At least Nicodemus is **curious**. He is literally **“in the dark,”** but his virtue is that he is curious enough to seek out Jesus and so move toward the light. **Will his curiosity be enough to sustain him through a somewhat confusing conversation with Jesus?** The conversation ends in grand familiarity. That God loves the world and sent the Son to the world as visible sign of that love. That is today’s Gospel, today’s good news! Let’s try to see that grand pronouncement as an answer. A thick, complex, engaging answer, to our **curious** questions.

It is good to have questions about ourselves and our relationship to God. We who are the church need, sometimes, to hold back our answers in order to cultivate the questions. At some point, though, we must also to proclaim Jesus as God’s great and glorious answer to our deepest, most pressing questions, as John does. The curiosity, the seeking sense that we

feel within, all our searching questions find their fulfillment in Jesus, light of the world, sign of God's grand love for the world. God so loved the world that God gave his Son.

This brings us to thinking about today's passage from John 3. Belief in the Jesus must go deeper than just belief in his teaching, for in his teaching he claimed that what would happen to him would provide the basis of salvation. The Son of Man would be lifted up, and belief in this lifted-up Son of Man would bring life. Jesus pointed to the story of Moses making a bronze snake, attaching it to a pole, and lifted it up for any snakebite victim to look at ... and live. To be lifted up, as Jesus understood it, had primary reference to being lifted up on the cross to die. Those who seek life must look to the crucified One as God's provision for salvation belief in the Son of Man must extend beyond belief in his teaching, for in his teaching he claimed that what would happen to him would provide the basis of salvation. The Son of Man would be lifted up, and belief in this lifted-up Son of Man would bring life.

Curiosity about Jesus is a great way to introduce Jesus to the world. People see something at work in us and through us and they become curious and ask. Then we can tell them about our motivation, our experiences of grace and love and mercy. We can tell them about Jesus. Because they

have already seen him at work in us, this one who was lifted up for us and for them and for the whole world.

THE SERMON IN A SENTENCE:

Lent is a great time to rediscover our curiosity about life in Jesus.

YOU:

Are you curious about Jesus? Now is a wonderful time to reignite your curiosity about Jesus. How will you work on becoming more curious about life? About Jesus?

CLOSE:

The human brain weighs three pounds. It is the size of a softball, and yet with it we have the capacity to learn something new every second of every minute of every hour of every day for the next three hundred million years. God has created us with an unlimited capacity to learn. What that tells me is that we ought to keep learning until the day we die.

Leonardo da Vinci once observed that the average human "**looks without seeing, listens without hearing, touches without feeling, eats without tasting, inhales without awareness of odor or fragrance, and talks without thinking.**" But not da Vinci. The quintessential Renaissance man called the five senses the **ministers** of the soul. Perhaps no one in history stewarded them better than he did. Famous for his paintings The Last Sup-

per and Mona Lisa, da Vinci trained himself in curiosity. He never went anywhere without his notebooks, in which he recorded ideas and observations in mirror-image cursive. His journals contain the genesis of some of his most ingenious ideas—a helicopter-like contraption he called an orinthopter, a diving suit, and a robotic knight. While on his own deathbed, he meticulously noted his own symptoms in his journal. That's devotion to learning. Seven thousand pages of da Vinci's journals have been preserved. Bill Gates purchased eighteen pages for \$30.8 million a few decades ago.

Let's pray to be more curious...