

February 24, 2019
Got Questions? Great!
John 14:1-7

What do you do when you get a letter like this?

"Dear Son: I am writing this slow because I know you can't read too fast. We don't live where we did when you left. Your Dad read in the paper that most accidents happen within twenty miles of home, so we moved. I can't send you the address as the last family that lived here took the numbers with them for their next house, so they wouldn't have to change their address. It rained here only twice last week, three days the first time and four the second. This place has a washing machine. But the first day I put four shirts in it, pulled the chain and I haven't seen them since.

"About your coat you want me to send you. Aunt Susie said it would be a little too heavy to send in the mail with them heavy buttons on it so we cut them off and put them in the pocket. Aunt Maisie is knitting you some socks. She would have sent them by now but I told her you had grown another foot since she last saw you so she had to knit another one. About your sister, she had a baby this morning. I haven't found out if it's a boy or a girl so I don't know if you're an aunt or an uncle.

"We got a bill from the funeral home and it said if we didn't make the last payment on Grandma's funeral, up she comes. Your Uncle John fell in the whiskey vat. Some men tried to pull him out but he fought them off and drowned. We cremated him and he burned for three days. Three of your friends went off the bridge in their pickup truck. One was driving and the other two were in the back. The driver got out – he rolled down the window and got to safety. The other two drowned – they couldn't get the tailgate open. Not much more news this time. Nothing much has happened. Love Mom."

After a letter like that there are just so many questions that come to mind ...

Not afraid to ask ...

Thomas is a person who has questions. He thinks about deep things. He wants real answers. Intelligent answers. Thoughtful answers. And the wonderful thing about Thomas is he's not afraid to ask questions.

We only meet Thomas four times in the gospels – and each time he's trying to figure things out. The first time we meet him Jesus is going up to Bethany after he receives the news that His friend, Lazarus has died. Bethany is close to Jerusalem where Jesus' life has been threatened by the Jewish leaders. Thomas muses, *"Let's go, too - and die with Jesus"* (John 11:16). Thomas, of all of Jesus' disciples, seems to "get it" that Jesus really is in danger. He has observed and understood enough to know this is serious. He is asking himself – and the others – how committed they really are to Jesus. Will they stay through the hard times? Will they risk their lives for Jesus? Thomas, at least, says he is prepared to stick with Jesus ...

The second time we meet Thomas is during Jesus' last supper. Jesus talked about His own upcoming suffering and death. He washed His disciples' feet, modelling God's sacrificial love and service. Judas left to betray him. Jesus also told Peter he will deny him. There is a lot going on in the disciples' minds. There is much stress, fear, worry ... and a lot of questions.

Then Jesus says, *"Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me. There is more than enough room in my Father's home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am. And you know the way to where I am going."* There is a lot packed into those few short words. I wonder what the disciples were thinking. With the benefit of hindsight, we know what is coming. But the disciples don't. Where is Jesus going? They don't yet fully understand what will come to pass.

Thomas has the courage to speak: *"We have no idea where you are going, so how can we know the way?"* It's a good question. Others may have thought it; only Thomas asked it.

Jesus' reply? *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me. If you had really known me, you would know who my Father is. From now on, you do know him and have seen him!"* There is a lot packed into those few words, too!

Jesus is the way

Jesus has talked about betrayal, denial, and death – He is talking to people who are worried, stressed, and anxious. He is talking about big questions. When we face the really big issues of life, what do we do? When we are worried where do we turn? When we are stressed where do we go? When we are anxious, what hope is there? Jesus says "I am the way ..."

The way to where? The way to God. Because ultimately the answer to stress and worry is to know that there is a God – a good God. Faced with big questions, we can come to Him.

That does not mean there are neat, simple answers. The answers are not trite. Horatio Spafford, a Chicago businessman, was ruined financially by the great Chicago Fire of 1871. Shortly after, his four daughters were killed in a collision between two ships while crossing the Atlantic to Britain. Several weeks later, as Spafford's own ship passed near the spot where his daughters died, Spafford was inspired to write these words:

*When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say,
It is well, it is well, with my soul.*

*Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
Let this blest assurance control,
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate,
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.*

We can find a way through Jesus, even though we cannot begin to comprehend answers ...

Jesus is the truth

When we are stressed we need truth. We need accurate, reliable, dependable information to hold on to, to give us hope, and to build our lives on. When we are looking for answers to the deep, deep questions of life – who am I? Do I have any value? What is my purpose? Why is this happening to me? Why does life hurt so much? We need the answers Jesus can provide: we are God's beloved children. We are those whom God loves unconditionally. He is with us always. Those are objective truths we can hold to, even when we don't "feel" God's presence. We are called to follow Jesus – to live our lives for Him and to live our lives like Him.

One of the great truths is that all of our guilt, sin, shame, failures, and mistakes are dealt with through the death and resurrection of Jesus:

*My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul.*

Jesus is the life

We can define life biologically: "the ability to grow, change, etc., that separates plants and animals from things like water or rocks."

Jesus draws on the Hebrew (Old Testament) understanding that human life is much, much more than just breathing or "being alive." In the Jewish tradition, real human life comes into being when people have a personal connection with their Creator, God, when His Spirit is breathed into you (Genesis 2:7). You can be physically alive without God, but you really come alive when you know God. We are "born again" to a new life – a richer, deeper, more fulfilling complete life – through faith in Jesus and life in His Spirit (John 3:1-33, 5:21, 6:51, John 14-16).

Jesus says, *"Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life ... For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life"* (John 3:6, 16).

"My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life" (John 10:10).

"This is the way to have eternal life – to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth" (John 17:3).

"These words are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life by the power of his name" (20:31).

Asking good questions, seeking good answers

What do we do when we have questions? In some Christian contexts we may not feel safe asking either the simple question (to which we think we should know the answer but don't) – people can make us feel stupid for even asking; or the hard question (that we know there is no simple answer for – people may have trite answers that just don't satisfy the deep longing in our souls).

So what do we do with our questions? As a church, we need to be a safe place where people can ask questions! When someone asks a question – be it a simple one, a disturbing one, or even a heretical one – listen! Respect the person who is asking. Really hear what they are asking (sometimes we jump to conclusions and miss the real issue). Then, help people find real answers – it is much more useful to help people find answers than to simply give them a stock response.

We could say the answer is simple: Jesus is the way, truth, and life (a little boy in Sunday School knew the sort of answers you're supposed to give to questions. The teacher asked, *'What is brown and furry, has a long tail, and stores up nuts for the winter?'* *'Well,'* the boy muttered, *'I guess the answer is "Jesus" but it sure sounds like a squirrel to me.'*). Seriously, when we have real questions we do come to Jesus to ask Him to help us find satisfying answers. If we want to know the way to know God – if we want to know truth – about life, the universe, and everything – if we want life – real life in relationship with God, filled and empowered by His Spirit – we come to Jesus. We spend time with Jesus. We talk with Jesus. We seek wisdom from Jesus. But there may not be simple, trite answers to the really challenging issues of 2019.

In practice what does this mean? It means we need to ask hard questions. We need to dig deep for good answers – in Scripture, in the wisdom of Christians through the ages – read good books and check out good websites, from godly friends, from one of us on staff. Think. Stretch. Push and pull your mind (love God with your mind). For some questions, you will find great answers. For other questions, like Horatio Spafford, we may have to live with a certain amount of mystery and faith. That's OK. Getting to know Jesus will help you develop a Spirit-filled mind.

The key is to have our minds and thoughts so shaped by the Spirit and by Jesus that we begin to think as He would think in our situation: *"Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect"* (Romans 12:2). Then, even when we face new challenges and hard questions in life, He will help us find a way, find truth, and discover life ...

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