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Introduction from Pastor Steve

We all have our questions of God... Why does God allow suffering? Will God answer my prayer? Is God even listening? Why does God allow evil? And of course, there are the "origin" questions of how all things, including us, came into being, and more. This season of Lent, we are delving into a fairly radical reorientation of the questions that God asks of human beings.

It stands to reason that if we were to orient our lives primarily around the questions that God asks of us, we would be changed. During Lent we will be looking at eight questions that God/Jesus asks of us. Each of these questions deserves a slow answer! Most of the questions challenge us at different layers or arenas of our life. It will take some time and the Holy Spirit's help to unpack what is going on, not just on the surface, but in our heart and soul.

I am grateful to all who have contributed to this devotional. Most of the names you will know and recognize: pastors and lay-persons, older and younger — all of us learning what it means to respond to God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength. May this be our prayer:

O God, let something essential happen to me, something more than interesting or entertaining or thoughtful.

O God,
let something essential happen to me,
something awesome, something real.
Speak to my condition, Lord,
and change me somewhere inside where it matters...

Ted Loder, Guerrillas of Grace

Genesis 3:8-10

⁸Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"

¹⁰He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

Scriptures to Read This Week

Monday: Genesis 3

Tuesday: Luke 15:1-10

Wednesday: Exodus 3:1-6
Thursday: 1 Kings 19:1-8

Friday: 1 Kings 19:9-13



The story is familiar to us, for it is our story. We've all lived it out one way or another. God gave humans a place in the garden – paradise! True, there were God-given boundaries/limits, given for our well-being and the well-being of others, and even creation.

Up until this point, the picture we are given of Adam and Eve is of them walking with God, being with God, and talking to and with God. In Genesis 3, something changes dramatically. Adam, Eve and the "serpent" are talking about God. The serpent alters and distorts their perception so that the boundaries become a threat. The serpent suggests the possibility of being like God. Fidelity gives way to analysis and calculation. Humans go after knowledge before trust, and... paradise is lost!

What is introduced is fear, nakedness and hiding. God comes to them with the first question: "Where are you?"

There are different ways we might respond. We could answer in terms of location: Adam and Eve are still in the garden, but hiding. We live in Midland, Texas. Location is important. Jacob met God in Bethel saying, "God was here and I didn't know it." God met Moses in the wilderness. Jesus came from Nazareth. We could also answer regarding our "stage of life": grade-school, middle school, high school, college, young adult, newly married, parenting age, empty nester, retired. Ruth Haley Barton, in her book concerning the Walk to Emmaus story, says we might be "between the now and the not yet," meaning we're on the threshold, needing transition, or being forced into something from one place or state of being to another.

I suspect God was probing deeper: "Where are you in relation to me?" Adam and Eve responded: "I heard you coming... I was afraid because I was naked... so I hid." If we are going to respond honestly to God's question, we must consider the ways we hide from God. This week invite the Holy Spirit to help you ponder God's question at all the levels.

Especially though, invite the Holy Spirit to reveal any and all ways you may be trying to hide.

The good news: God is forever looking and seeking. "Where are you?"

Steve Schorr

Genesis 4:8-9

⁸ Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

⁹Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?"

"I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?"

Scriptures to Read This Week

Monday: Genesis 4

Tuesday: *Luke 15:11-32*

Wednesday: Matthew 5:21-26

Thursday: 1 John 4:16-21

Friday: Luke 10:25-37 and Ephesians 2:13-14



The story of Cain and Abel may be the origin of "sibling rivalry." The estrangement of brother and brother (or sister) seems to be our common lot. It seems the world wants to keep it so.

A couple of things to notice about this story: No reason is given for why God had "regard" for Abel's offering and had "no regard" for Cain's. It seems that the point of the story concerns how Cain responds. Will it be with anger and envy? Or will Cain "do well?" John Steinbeck insightfully recognized this major theme in his book *East of Eden*. The Hebrew word is *timsel*, which carries a stronger tone of "you may rule over (the anger/sin)" or "you may do well" in how you treat your brother/sister. This is an encouraging thought: with God's help, relationships with brother, sister, and neighbor may go well. It leaves open the New Testament promise of reconciliation.

Of course, God's question comes after Cain has already killed Abel. Most certainly, God knew what happened. Thus, Cain's response "...am I my brother's keeper?" is an excuse often used to this day. It's impossible to "hide" or lie about what we've done, as God already knows. The Cain and Abel story reminds us that we cannot separate the issues of our relationship with God from our relationship with our siblings and neighbors. One cannot help but notice the similarities between this story and that of the "Prodigal Son" story that Jesus told. It ends with the older brother (like Cain) unwilling to enter the celebration for his younger brother. 1 John 4:20-21 drives the important theme home "...those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also."

All of us have experienced the brokenness, dysfunction, disappointment, hurt, rivalry, guilt and shame that comes with *being* a brother, sister or neighbor, and in *having* a sister, brother and neighbor. Maybe we could hear this question from God as an invitation. Where is our brother/sister/neighbor? Whether distant or close, involved or estranged, what is our heart attitude toward them? Whether we feel angry or calm, envious or supportive, God's question includes an invitation to honesty and an opportunity to experience grace, which moves us towards healing. May we be open to how our Lord might transform us and our relationships.

Who is the brother, sister, neighbor you could pray for today?

Mark 10:51-52

⁵¹ "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him. The blind man said, "Rabbi, I want to see."

⁵² "Go," said Jesus, "your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

Scriptures to Read This Week

Monday: Mark 10:46-52
Tuesday: Revelation 1:4-8
Wednesday: Matthew 9:1-8
Thursday: Psalm 103

Friday: John 14:6-14



Blind Bartimaeus awoke, never imagining what would happen that day. As he begged by the roadside in Jericho, things were going just as they did most days. A few coins, a couple of tiny portions of food. But then his ears, fine-tuned from years of heavy use, pick out the news that Jesus of Nazareth is arriving. No longer content to sit quietly as though this were a normal day, Bartimaeus begins shouting, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" He awoke that day expecting to simply survive, but all of a sudden the possibility of something much more arrived with Jesus.

As so often happens, Jesus' attention turns to this marginalized man that the crowd has been hushing. Jesus calls and Bartimaeus jumps to his feet. There, eye to eye with Jesus, Bartimaeus hears the question: "What do you want me to do for you?" Without reservation and with great respect, Bartimaeus delivers the response he's rehearsed so many times in his mind: "Rabbi, I want to see."

What amazing faith! Bartimaeus clearly knows Jesus is special as he begs for mercy from the "Son of David." But his answer to Jesus' question reveals powerful faith. He believes Jesus can give him sight. It's a big ask—something no one else passing by on the road that day could have done. Bartimaeus has taken a great risk in putting such faith in Jesus. And Jesus rewards this faith.

Though we may not be blind in the way Bartimaeus was, I think Jesus is asking us the same question. "What do you want me to do for you?" I'm tempted to keep my answer within the realm of possibility. It would be like if Bartimaeus simply asked Jesus for a sandwich—more than he expects from most people, but not impossible. Instead, Jesus is looking for us to make a request that requires faith—something impossible without Jesus.

Of course, salvation is found only in Jesus, but what else do we ask for that only Jesus can do? What kind of change do you need in your own life? Maybe it's physical healing. Maybe a behavior or a heart change that you can't bring about on your own. Maybe a broken relationship where reconciliation has been out of your reach. Let's follow Bartimaeus' example today and faithfully ask Jesus for something only He can do.

John 5:1-5

Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals. ² Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep pool. Gate which Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. ³Here a great number of disabled people used to lie-the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. 5 One who was there had been an thirty-eight for invalid years. ⁶ When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?"

Scriptures to Read This Week

Monday: John 5:1-17

Tuesday: Philippians 4:4-13 Wednesday: Jeremiah 17:5-18 Thursday: Philippians 1:19-26

Friday: Psalm 30



This question is asked of a man who had been lame for 38 years. He lay beside a pool which was reported to have healing capabilities. Healing came to the first person to enter the water when the waters stirred. Jesus asked him, "Do you want to get well?" The invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in someone goes ahead of me."

There are many ways in which we are lame or paralyzed today. Perhaps it is a physical illness, emotional problems, addictive behavior (such as drugs, alcohol, pornography, gambling, sex, gossip), strained relationships, financial needs or anything else that has a negative effect on our lives. It is in times such as this that Jesus asks us, "Do you want to get well?"

Some persons may prefer to remain imprisoned to these lifestyles rather than take a risk on the unknown. Maybe they fear the discomforts they will experience on their way to a cure. Often getting healed requires hard work on our part before we see the manifestation of our healing.

Others of us may simply want to put off our healing. This group belongs to the *as-soon-as* group. Examples are: "I will start my diet as soon as the holidays are over." Or, "I'll start my physical rehab as soon as this project is completed." Or perhaps, "I'll start family counseling as soon as he/she apologizes." You can fill in your own *as-soon-as* excuse.

Others belong to the *if-only* category. "If only I did not have to fill out all the paperwork and go for an interview, I would apply for that job." Or, "If only I did not have to be in a treatment facility for a period of time, I would get help." "If only someone would help me, I would..."

Regardless of what we are experiencing, there is help and there is hope, but we have to be willing to experience the hard part. We must wrestle with the question, "Do you want to get well?" With Jesus there is no reason to fear the unknown, no reason to make excuses or procrastinate. Philippians 4:13 tells us, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

Jonah 4:2-4

²He prayed to the LORD, "Isn't this what I said, LORD, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who from relents sendina calamity. ³ Now, LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live."

⁴But the LORD replied, "Is it right for you to be angry?"

Scriptures to Read This Week

Monday: Jonah 1 and 2 Tuesday: Jonah 3 and 4 Wednesday: Matthew 20:1-16

Thursday: James 1:19-20



God may be slow to anger, as Jonah bemoans, but I am not. When I'm inconvenienced, offended, or feel vulnerable, I get angry. When politicians pass laws I don't like, I get angry. When activists on the *Other Side of This Moment's Very Important Issue* take a stand I disagree with, I get angry. If I take time to look more closely and honestly at these flashes of anger, I see a common thread underneath: I'm afraid.

I'm afraid of being misunderstood or misrepresented or — worst of all — found to be wrong. I'm afraid that maybe the "bad guys" will win. I'm afraid that my children will get hurt or that I might not have enough: energy, time, money, resources. I'm afraid justice won't be meted out according to my (obviously correct) terms, or that if everyone doesn't do their part, the world I'm trying to carefully balance and control will come crashing down.

To be honest, I've always appreciated Jonah's honesty, and I sympathize with him. In spite of his angry sullenness, he's at least reasonable. He's studious and thoughtful — he knows God and he knows all about the wicked Ninevites. He has weighed, measured, and evaluated the situation, and he's arrived at a logical conclusion: He's afraid if the Ninevites repent, they won't get what they have coming to them. Jonah is so sure of this — enraging! unjust! — conclusion that he actively avoids God's call... and ends up fish vomit. By the time God questions him, Jonah has turned into your average petulant child: While he might have had to obey, he doesn't have to be happy about it.

Jonah is a lot like the responsible elder brother in the Prodigal Son story, resenting his Father's compassion toward his wayward younger brother (Luke 15:11-32). Or the indignant disciples who wanted to call down fire from heaven to punish inhospitable Samaritans (Luke 9:51-54). Or maybe a lot like me, flush with self-righteous anger at even the slightest inconvenience or provocation. Jonah is a mirror to our humanity.

There's something else mixed in with my fear: arrogance. I don't know about you, but I tend to place myself on the right side of history. It's easy for me to share Jonah's indignation because I act as if I came from the line of Jonah. But honesty requires humility: I could just as easily be the distant descendent of the most wicked Ninevite, a reality that makes me suddenly grateful for God's mercy. You and me, we *might not have been* if God hadn't relented.

It seems to me that behind God's question to Jonah (and you and me) is a gentle invitation to confess our fears, let go of control, and trust: to trust that God's mercy is wide and abundant enough to cover both foe and friend, enemy and brother, you and me. To trust that if God is patient with the wicked, he's also patient with you and me. To trust not in the rightness of our own dimly lit, time-bound opinions, but in God's timeless, durable righteousness.

Carrie McKean

Matthew 16:13-16

¹³ When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

¹⁴They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

¹⁵ "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

Scriptures to Read This Week

Monday: Matthew 16:13-24

Tuesday: Acts 3:11-26 Wednesday: Psalm 1:1-6

Thursday: Psalm 145:1-9

Friday: Hebrews 5:1-10



Imagine you have a night out with friends. As you sit around the dinner table discussion moves towards a topic that illicits strong feelings from everyone. Who is the G.O.A.T of _____? (Greatest Of All Time.) It could be a musician, actor, politician, athlete, etc. Everyone gives their two cents and argue back and forth. After all that, you may or may not change your opinion, but you most certainly *have* an opinion.

As the disciples follow Jesus, they experience dynamic teaching, healings, miracles, and controversies with religious teachers. It is all hard to explain but they know they have witnessed something unique. Jesus starts by asking, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" The disciples give the polite answers: John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the prophets. Some might even describe Jesus as a blasphemer, a false prophet, a holy person, a rabbi, a lunatic, an interesting fellow, a rabble-rouser, or a good guy.

The question then becomes more specific and more personal, "Who do you say I am?"

What really matters is what do *you* believe, not what others say. We have all heard descriptions of Jesus from scripture, creeds, or experts. What has been your experience with Jesus? Who do *you* say He is?

Does it matter who you say God is? Yes, it matters. Jesus, after all, takes time to ask the question! Our definition does not change God, but it clarifies what we believe. For example, Peter's description of Jesus as the Messiah is powerful. Peter's use of Messiah changes from Matthew 16 to Acts 3:18. At first, Peter thinks Jesus is going to restore Israel to its previous grandeur harkening back to the time of David, who people also called the Messiah. A Messiah who suffers and dies is out of the question for Peter as he follows up his messianic pronouncement by rebuking Jesus. It is not until Peter has spent more time with Jesus and experienced the resurrection that his description of the Messiah matches Jesus' own identity. We are all on a journey, and with each step, may we come to know and experience Jesus more fully, as He truly is. It may take time but Jesus is willing to walk with you.

Who do you say that Jesus is?

Mark 10:37-39

³⁷They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory."

³⁸ "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?"

³⁹ "We can," they answered.

Scriptures to Read This Week

Monday: Mark 10:32-45

Tuesday: Zechariah 9:9-13

Wednesday: John 12:12-19 and Matthew 19:27-30

Thursday: John 15:12-25

Friday: John 20:1-31



Palm Sunday, the triumphant entrance into Jerusalem, is the beginning of Holy Week. On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus tells his disciples things that astonish them and frighten other followers. Jesus reveals that the Son of Man will be betrayed, put to death, and after three days, will rise again.

But then, as if they hadn't heard a word Jesus said, James and John come to Jesus wanting something for themselves. They ask, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory." (Their desire for standing in His kingdom was most certainly mixed — a longing for influence combined with a sincere desire to be as close to the Lord as possible.)

Jesus said to them, "You don't know what you are asking! Are you able to drink from the bitter cup of suffering I am about to drink? Are you able to be baptized with the baptism of suffering I must be baptized with?" "Oh yes," they replied, "we are able!"

They have no idea what they are asking... nor do we. How often are we quick to ask for what we want from Jesus without considering His will? Drinking from the cup Jesus drank is living in and with the Spirit of Jesus, which is unconditional love.

Then Jesus told James and John, "You will indeed drink from my bitter cup and be baptized with my baptism of suffering.

The other disciples become indignant when they hear about it. This kind of interpersonal friction and conflict was present among the first group of disciples, just as it is among today's disciples.

Jesus steps in and settles the dispute: whoever wants to become great among you must be a servant, and whoever wants to be first must be a slave of all.

Drinking the cup is not a heroic act with a nice reward! It is not part of a tit-for-tat agreement. Drinking the cup is an act of selfless love, an act of immense trust, an act of surrender to a God who will give us what we need when we need it.

Can You Drink the Cup?, Henri J.M. Nouwen

Charlotte Bosecker

Matthew 16:24-26

²⁴ Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. ²⁶ What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?

"Easter (Christ's resurrection) is either the supreme fact of history or a hoax. It becomes the supreme fact of our lives or it's all smoke and mirrors." Frederick Buechner

"Resurrection life is for scarred people and scared people. When we come together as we are, we begin to rise again, to believe again, to hope again, to live again."

Brian McLaren

Scriptures to Read This Week

Monday: Matthew 16:21-28 Tuesday: Deuteronomy 6:1-9 Wednesday: Psalm 23 Thursday: Psalm 19:7-14

Friday: Matthew 22:34-40



We Christians say that Christ's resurrection is the supreme fact of history and that resurrection life is not just to change our address for eternity, but also to change our lives here and now. Jesus' resurrection gives us an opportunity to rise anew, believe again, hope again, and to live now in the way that Jesus described as *abundant* life!

While it may not seem immediately apparent, it seems that Jesus' question about our souls is a "resurrection" question – a question directed to what is required to truly live, thrive, and be purposeful and free as a disciple of the Lord.

Jesus' question about the soul takes us to what is most important. What is the *heart of the matter*? What will shape the rest of our lives? When talking about the soul, we are not thinking of *soul* as some amorphous, ill-defined sort of thing. As Scripture uses it, *soul* is the part of you that is most real, the essence of you, that God knew before He brought you into physical form.

The *soul* is that part of me, and you, that exists before any role I play or job I have. It is beyond any relationship that seems to define me. Jesus said it is possible to gain success in business, family life, ministry, achievements of any sort, and still lose your soul. Ruth Haley Barton says losing your soul is a bit like losing your credit card: you keep it in your wallet and don't give it much thought, until one day you reach for it and can't find it. When you realize it's gone, you start scrambling around to find it. When did you last use it? Where were you? No matter what else is going on, you stop to look for it because major damage could be done. Would that we feel the same urgency about our souls! Parker Palmer says our souls are like wild animals; if we're rushing around, things are loud and frenetic and our soul will not tend to emerge.

How do we recognize when things are not well with our souls? Is it really possible to say, truthfully, it is well with my soul? Is anything worth more than your soul? This side of resurrection we can actually trust that God will restore our soul, heal our soul, keep our soul, and we can love and serve with all our heart and soul!

Is it well with your soul? What good would it be for someone to gain the whole world and yet lose their soul?

Steve Schorr



Schedule of Services at First Presbyterian Church Midland

SUNDAY, APRIL 2 - PALM SUNDAY

Services at 9:15 and 11:00 a.m. | Children will process with palms at the 11:00 service.

THURSDAY, APRIL 6 - MAUNDY THURSDAY

6:30 p.m. in Sanctuary | A service to remember Jesus' last supper with His disciples

FRIDAY, APRIL 7 - GOOD FRIDAY

Noon in Chapel | A service to remember the night Jesus was crucified

SUNDAY, APRIL 9 - EASTER SUNDAY

Sunrise Service | 7:00 a.m. on the Plaza (No nursery available)
 Contemporary Service | 9:15 a.m. in the Chapel
 Family Easter Celebration | 10:15-10:45 a.m. in Children's Ministry Space
 Traditional Service | 11:00 a.m. in the Sanctuary

On Easter, we will not have First Pres Kids during worship services. Nursery will be provided, but older children will remain with families in worship.