

Much like children's chat, every week in chapel, I try to enter our kids into the lesson for the day with a question. Sometimes it's silly and sometimes it's thoughtful. I will admit, I'm always anxious before I ask the thoughtful questions, because you worry that the kids will roll their eyes and be like it is 8 in the morning, I do not want to think too deeply about this. Yet, they always end up amazing me, and this week was no exception. This week actually bowled me over a bit with some of the answers I got.

The question I asked my kids *and* teachers this week was, what is something that you don't understand or that confuses you? I shared with them that my brain cannot comprehend space, and I know, living in NASA central will make that a slightly unpopular answer, but I can't think about it. Space, for me, is too vast, too unknowable to be able to properly wrap my head around and so I have to not think about it. I had a decent handful of kids agree with me on that. We declared ourselves Team Space and felt comfortable in knowing we did not know a thing about space. And I got other answers along a similar vein, things like the ocean, time, the earth in general. These big, huge things that are so big they defy comprehension.

Now, of course, there were also the amusing answers. Some students declared that they didn't understand why they had homework or why their dog likes to chew everything in sight. Others wondered why younger

siblings insist on being so annoying, while as a counterpoint someone else wondered why older siblings have to be right about everything. Amusingly, several students *and* teachers declared they did not understand *math*, math as a whole, general concept. One of my favorites was Kimberly Darnell, our second grade teacher, and a fellow Michigander, who declared she did understand drivers in Virginia and said she longed for a return to a place where Michigan lefts are a thing that are just known and understood.

But in the midst of the amusing and the curious, there were several that were quite serious...I don't understand why there is so much evil in the world and why it's allowed to happen. That was from one of our fourth graders. I don't understand why people can't be kind. Third grader. I don't understand like infinity...time...eternity. Like what all of this means and what comes after. Eighth grader. One of our middle schoolers threw out her arms and said, "Can I just say, all of this?! I don't understand life in general!" And all around her, heads nodded up and down from her fellow students and teachers alike. All of us couldn't help but agree, because at the end of the day, yeah, who on earth understands *life*?

It was one of my favorite conversations we've ever had in chapel, because at the end of the day it highlighted one fundamental truth. It doesn't matter how old you are, how much life you have seen, we all have *at least*

one thing that we just do not understand, that our brains cannot take in and process without feeling entirely overloaded. Whether you're a teacher who doesn't get math or a student who doesn't understand the weight of the world, we all have something, something that kicks that just doesn't compute no matter how hard we try to get a grip on it. It's as true today as it was 2,000 years ago, because I think if you were to ask the disciples my chapel question, what is something you don't understand, they would have just wildly gestured at Jesus and ultimately went, *this*, him, just all of him. I don't know if that would always be their answer, but at least during our gospel this morning, Jesus in general would definitely be high on the list.

We've crested the halfway point of Mark's gospel. We actually hit it last week with Peter's confession and Jesus declaring what it means that he is the Messiah. The heart and center of Mark's gospel is that first instance of Jesus pointing towards the cross and his fate. But because this is Mark and most people who should be in the know in Mark tend to be completely clueless about pretty much everything, Jesus has to keep reiterating his point in the hopes that by sheer repetition it will hit home. Ultimately, Jesus will walk the disciples through the story of his upcoming Passion *three* times, and today's gospel is the second time around.

As Jesus and the disciples continue to move and travel around Galilee, Jesus takes advantage of the time alone to continue teaching the disciples. You have to imagine that, when all the crowds are around, the disciples don't get as much learning time from Jesus, probably occupied with crowd control and making sure they're aware of what's going on. Plus, with the crowds, sometimes Jesus has to teach more generically, so when he actually has the disciples alone, he has time to really teach them, to let them in on what he needs them as his inner circle to know. So once again, he takes the opportunity to lay out what is going to happen to him.

Jesus doesn't try to sugar coat this either. Even though he's talking to people who love him dearly, he doesn't mince words or try to couch it in easier terms. He just puts it right out there. He is going to be betrayed and his fate will be placed into human hands. They are going to kill him, *but* three days after his death he will rise again. For us sitting here with Easter and resurrection hindsight, we hear this and we're like, yup, totally what happens, fellas. It sounds scary, but it's going to be alright. Because of that I'm not sure we can properly imagine what this has to feel like for the disciples, how much this has to make their brains want to explode.

For the disciples, this hits on multiple levels. On just a basic, human level, this is their friend, this is their companion, this is the guy they've been

hanging out with and living life with for years, and somehow they have to comprehend that he's going to not only die, but be killed. There's no stopping it. Someone they love is going to die and they have no control over that whatsoever. Then you throw in the religious, hopeful level of this and everything just goes entirely sideways. They have chosen to follow Jesus because they believe he is the Messiah, the one come to redeem all of Israel and free them from the oppression of the Roman Empire. The last thing the Messiah is supposed to do is die. Yet...that's exactly what Jesus is saying, so what are they supposed to do with that? Does this mean Jesus *isn't* the Messiah? Does this mean all of their learning about who the Messiah is has been wrong? Does this mean that the entire foundation of their faith has been built on incorrect information? Mark tells us that the disciples have no clue what any of what Jesus told them meant. He says, they did not understand what he was saying, but here's the really big piece of it...and they were afraid to ask him.

The disciples are afraid to ask Jesus questions. Take that in. The disciples are afraid to ask Jesus questions. It doesn't matter that those questions would help them understand life, their faith, their journey, Jesus himself better, they were too overcome by fear to give themselves the grace to learn, to grow, to *live*. Think about how different the remainder of their

journey with Jesus would have been if they had taken this moment to start asking questions, to start figuring things out. Those terrifying days after the crucifixion might not have been so scary. Those moments in the Garden of Gethsemane might have been a little less tense. Their faith might not have been so shaken. If only they had let themselves dare to *ask*...

I don't know when or why it happens, but somewhere along the line, as adults, we stop being willing to ask questions, particularly when it comes to faith. We look at the world around us, a world that is tinged with chaos and heartbreak and flat out evil, and a tiny question flickers in the back of our minds about where is God, what does our faith have to say about this, but more often than not we tamp those questions down because what would people *think* if they knew I was wondering, if they knew I was questioning? We become afraid to poke and prod at our faith too much as though it is this fragile thing that could burst with the slightest of pressure. But the thing is...I know that James has reminded us lately that faith without works is dead, but I also dare to say that faith without questions is dead. The questions are what help us to keep growing, to keep drawing closer to God. We never have to *fear* asking God questions or asking questions about God, because people have been doing it literally since the beginning of time, and God has not abandoned them. There is no thou shalt not ask questions

commandment. Jesus encouraged people to ponder, to stretch, to give life and breath to their faith so that it continued to be a living thing, not some dead husk that is there, but doesn't give any vibrancy to life.

Someone in Bible study said this week that we let our fear stop us from fully living, and it about stopped me dead in my tracks, because she was right, entirely. My finding space incomprehensible is more a sign of my fear at its vast unknowability. Yet, if I allowed myself to start learning and delving into it, what incredible things might I find? The same goes for our faith. We let all the things we're afraid of, the things we think we don't want to know, the things we don't think we want to question, keep our faith stagnant. We don't want to give voice to the questions because what if it's a slippery slope to doubt and unbelief? But what if those questions are actually a pathway towards deeper understanding of God, of your faith, of the world around you? What if you dared to ask the questions you have always been afraid to ask and found that others had the same ones and you can start to learn together? Life is too short to live in fear of what we don't know. Life is too short to let our faith shrivel on the vine all because we fear it won't hold up to the questions. In fact, this week, I dare you, I challenge you to make a list of questions. See what your heart wants to know, and maybe, just maybe, it might be the beginning of a beautiful journey. **AMEN**