

Title: “Hiding from the Question”

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Mark 9:30-32

9/19/2021

Service Readings: Jeremiah 11:18-20; James 3:13-4:10; Mark 9:30-37

What if the disciples knew, really knew the problem of sin and understood that the answer was living among them? They would be forced to respond, and the demands of that response would be transformative to their lives. Maybe it was better to hide from the question, instead.

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

³⁰ They went on from there and passed through Galilee. And he did not want anyone to know, ³¹ for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise.” ³² But they did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask him.

Don't ask the question if you don't want to hear the answer. Children know this instinctively and it is the reason that you'll never hear one ask a parent if it is time for bed. They know that simply asking the question guarantees a response that will initiate the nighttime ritual they so very much dread. And the hope is that by *not* asking, it will somehow secure an alternative that is much more favorable, at least for them. And so, with hushed voices and quiet steps, they tiptoe in the shadows, far from the line of sight of their parents, celebrating every minute they escape the prisons of their bedrooms. And this practice tends to follow us into adulthood. If we don't look at our bank balance, we'll not have to face our financial reality. If we don't call the doctor, we'll not have to deal with the results of the test. We play games with ourselves thinking that we can control an outcome by simply not facing the problem. And so, we don't ask these types of questions because we don't want to hear the answers. And we don't want to hear the answers because they usually demand a response from us. Now that we know our financial situation, we feel compelled to act. Now that we know the results of the test, we are forced to take the next step. You see, these are the questions that we don't want to ask because these are the questions that require engagement. They are questions that pull us in – into a situation or reality that we want to run from. They are the questions that compel us to act, to change. They are the questions that push us out of our comfort zones – and I don't know about you, but I very much prefer to remain located squarely in the middle of my comfort zone.

And the disciples would, too. This was not the first time that Jesus had foretold his death and resurrection. It was the second! They had already heard this from him once before. And Peter even responded that time by pulling him aside to rebuke him, but Jesus replied by saying, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.” So what were they afraid of? What were they trying to hide from? It wasn't the answer or even the knowledge. It was the impact that this reality would have on each one of them. Knowing the answer would require some sort of response, maybe even some sort of action on their part. No

doubt that they had discussed this amongst themselves ever since hearing it for the first time. And undoubtedly they would have imagined their own lives if what Jesus told them did come true. They would be without a teacher, they would be without a leader. The one that they placed all their trust in would be taken from them. Where would that leave them? Would they experience the same fate, themselves? Would they be delivered into the hands of men who would torture and kill them? Is this what Jesus was leading them towards? Their deaths? They knew that Jesus didn't want them to defend him when he was turned over to those who would kill him – he had made that very clear to Peter the first time he talked about this. So, if they couldn't defend *him* that probably meant that they couldn't defend *themselves*. And if they couldn't defend themselves, their fate would surely mirror the fate of their master. It is no wonder they were afraid to ask any questions. Doing so would demand action and the choices were just too frightening to contemplate. And if they ask him, and if he confirms all their fears, then what? Do they continue to follow, knowing where the road ends or do they turn away from him, rejecting his teachings in the hopes of saving their own lives? Instead, they decided to keep their questions to themselves and argue about something less disturbing – which of them was the greatest.

Don't ask the question if you don't want to hear the answer.

This is our human nature – one that reflects the consequences of sin. We are self-serving, self-preserving and will go to great lengths to secure our safety and continued existence. Indeed, look at Adam and Eve. There in the garden they created a problem that begat a question. And that question concerned what it would take to rectify the problem that they had just created. But nowhere in Genesis does it record them even asking that question. They stayed silent, maybe thinking that if they didn't ask they wouldn't have to face the consequences of their sin. That maybe if they didn't ask, the problem would go away on its own and the question would never even have to be asked.

That was their nature; that is our nature. But this is not God's nature. He is not self-serving but “us-serving.” He is not self-preserving but “us-preserving.” After the sin of Adam, he didn't shy away from the question like they did. In fact, even before he *created* Adam, he knew the problem that they would create, and he *knew* the sacrifice that would be required by the answer. And even with that knowledge, that understanding, he still created Adam and he still created us.

And Jesus, fully God also knew the question and he knew that he was the answer. He knew that he had been sent by the Father to be the answer for mankind and he was trying to explain this to his disciples that day. “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise.” And he accepted this fact willingly. This is what he told them. It was the answer to the question that Adam and Eve never even asked. And you would think that the disciples would want to understand this and rejoice in the answer who was standing before them. But they were instead still inward focused. Maybe worried that the others would think their questions were childish, maybe worried about the harm that might come to them, or maybe worried about something else. But whatever it was, they were seemingly not worried about understanding the real problem and how Jesus was the real answer.

And so, what do they do, instead? They continue to set it aside. They continue to hide from the knowledge and truth about Jesus and instead set their minds on determining who was greatest.

And Jesus shuts that down and points them back to himself. They must live like him: as a servant to mankind. They must continue to remind the world of God's answer by loving like Jesus loved and serving like Jesus served.

And we stand here today, no differently than the disciples did in their time. We declare ourselves Christian, but do we shy away from the question because we know that the answer will affect how we live our lives? Do we pretend that we don't fully understand the answer that Jesus was for us and how that means that we are to receive others in his name? Here's what I mean:

A friendship, once close but now broken because of the hurtful things that she said. She has reached out to you repeatedly in search of forgiveness and reconciliation. You know what Jesus says about this, you have heard his command many times before. And if you ask him about *this* one, you know what his answer will be, but you just can't bring yourself to forgive – and so you don't ask.

You are driving on the streets of Cleveland and at a stop light see a man with a sign and a cup. His eyes try desperately to meet yours but you evade his beckoning and stare straight ahead. Is this man *really* poor? Will he use your money to better himself or will he just drink it away? You know that Jesus calls us to care for one another, to love one another like he has loved us. And if you ask him about *this* one, you know what his answer will be, but you just can't bring yourself to help – and so you don't ask.

There is this one thing that you enjoy, this one thing that you *know* Jesus doesn't approve of, but it brings you joy. You justify it to yourself and even find others like you who claim to find support in Scripture. But you know. Deep down you know what Jesus would say if you asked him about it. You know what his answer will be, but you just can't bring yourself to change – and so you don't ask.

Today's message is a very difficult one. Jesus is calling us to not shy away from understanding the problem of sin and our role in it. He's asking us to reflect on our lives and see all the times that we *have* shied away from this truth and he's calling us to believe that *he is the answer* and to repent and then respond to his work by loving others in his name.

I continue to fail at this, but today I renew my commitment to try again. What about you?

Please pray with me.

Lord, help me to really understand the problem that you came to Earth to solve. Give me strength to open my eyes to the corruption of sin the role that it continues to play in my life. But also give me the courage to believe that you are the answer to my sin and help me to respond to this knowledge by living like you – as a selfless servant to all. In your name we pray.

Amen.