

## **Arguing with God**

Luke 20:27-38

November 10, 2013

Would you like to pick a fight with God? Would you like to argue with God? Maybe you have. Have you? But whether you have or whether you haven't, I want to know, right now, today, if you could, if you would, if you dared, would you argue with God? About something you don't understand? About something you feel is not fair? About something that God is not doing that you think God should be doing?

If you could, if you would, if you dared, would you argue with God, right now? On your own behalf, or maybe on behalf of someone else?

Or would you not, because you are too afraid to try to argue with God?

Or would you not, because it seems unseemly, not appropriate, not right to argue with God?

Or would you not, because arguing with God seems pointless? Because it won't change anything? Because it doesn't matter? Because it doesn't matter ...?

There is a long tradition of arguing with God, a long tradition of good people arguing with God. Abraham argued with God. Abraham pleaded with God on behalf of innocent people in Sodom and Gomorrah, asking God to withhold his judgment and spare the cities: "Surely you won't kill the innocent with the guilty. That's impossible! You can't do that! The judge of all the earth has to act justly." Abraham convinced God to spare the cities if ten, if just ten, innocent people were found in them.

Moses argued with God. When the people of Israel fashioned a bull-calf out of melted gold and worshipped it as the god who brought them out of Egypt, the Lord was determined to destroy them and start over with Moses and his descendants. But Moses protested: "Lord, why should you be so angry with your people, whom you rescued from Egypt with great might and power? Why should the Egyptians be able to say that you led your people out of Egypt, planning to kill them in the mountains? Stop being angry; change your mind and do not bring this disaster on your people. Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Remember the promise you made to them." And the Bible says the Lord listened to Moses and changed his mind.

Job argued with God. Job felt that his suffering was entirely unfair, entirely undeserved -- which it was! -- and he demanded an audience with God. He demanded an opportunity to meet God face-to-face, to be able to state his case and ask his questions. And he got his audience with God!

There is a long tradition of good people arguing with God, so go ahead! Take up an argument with God, if you really want to. But if you do, remember two things. If you're going to ask God a question, you better be prepared for the answer, and God's answer may be far, far different from any answer you might have expected or could ever have imagined. Just ask Job! And if you are going to argue with God, remember who you are arguing with: not a colleague, not your spouse, not a friend, not your peer, but God. You are arguing with the living God!

A group of Sadducees posed Jesus a question: "Whose wife will she be?" You see, they did not believe in resurrection, while Jesus did. Their hypothetical story and their punchline question are meant to embarrass Jesus, to make a belief in resurrection seem ridiculous, silly. "So, Jesus, whose wife will she be? How will they sort it out? Or will she then be married to seven husbands simultaneously?"

The Sadducees were trying to make Jesus look silly. They weren't arguing with God. Or were they? To whom does the power to give life belong? Not to us, but to God! Only God knows anything about what, if anything, lies on the other side of death. Only God can answer whether or not people will rise from death.

The Sadducees felt most confident in their own wisdom and rationality, confident enough to mock the notion of a resurrection from death. But they forgot who they were arguing with!

By all means, argue with God, but remember who you are arguing with. Be serious about it! Don't mock God. Don't ask silly or frivolous or facile questions. Don't use brush off questions, avoidance questions, easy escape questions.

Questions like: "If there really is a God, why is there so much suffering in the world?"

That's a question meant to flick away any serious thought about both God and suffering. Argue with God! Ask God the question! "God, you are good, so, tell me, why must people suffer so? How long, how long, will this be? Come down. Come here. Have mercy on us. Set things right."

Questions like: “If there really is a God, why are the people who claim to believe in him so messed up?”

That’s a cop out, an easy escape question. Pointing to the obvious frailty and humanity of all of us becomes an excuse for avoiding any serious consideration of the word and the spirit and the presence of God as it is in this world. Take God seriously! Argue with God! Ask God why people are still so messed up. Better yet, ask God why you are still so messed up! Ask God to reveal himself to you. Ask God to change you.

The question posed by the Sadducees was, according to Luke’s gospel, the third and last in a series of questions directed at Jesus after his arrival in the city of Jerusalem. The first two questions came from the Pharisees and their cohorts, questions challenging Jesus’ authority and asking his opinion on paying taxes to the Roman empire. They were attacking questions, meant to expose Jesus to charges of blasphemy and sedition, to get him in trouble with both the Jews and Rome.

Jesus answered each of these questions with a question of his own, not directly answering, but putting the onus back on his questioners, making them answer their own questions. Jesus successfully parried their attacks.

But Jesus reply to the Sadducees was different. He didn’t play games with them, but answered them directly. Why, do you suppose? Well, if the Pharisees’ questions were darts meant to hurt Jesus, the Sadducees’ question was a whoopie cushion, and Jesus turned the tables on them by taking them seriously!

Jesus’ answer to them came in two parts. The first part? “Don’t be silly! Life in the age to come will be different! Or would you expect the new creation to be exactly like the old one, the new age to be exactly like this present age?”

But the heart of Jesus’ answer lies in the second part.

*Moses clearly proves that the dead are raised to life. In the passage about the burning bush he speaks of the Lord as “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” He is the God of the living, not of the dead, for to him all are alive.*

The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob. That’s the proof? Just because the Lord identified himself to Moses as the same God his ancestors worshiped? That’s no proof of resurrection! That’s no answer!

No more answer and no less answer than Job got. The answer Job got and the answer the Sadducees got and the answer we get is this: God is. "I am who I am," God says. "I am."

"I am, and I am the God of Abraham. I am the God of Isaac. I am the God of Jacob." He is the living God and the God of the living, for to him all are alive.

The answer has nothing to do with the possibility of resurrection and everything to do with the power of God. If the God who is, deigns to identify himself as the God of these humble creatures -- I am the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob; I am the God of Miah and Steve and Natalie; I am the God of George and Bob and Mitzi; I am the God of Helen and Chuck and Jean -- then ...? What does that mean?

Jesus said it. To him, to the living God, all are alive.

It's really about humility, again! Humility is acknowledging who God is, taking God seriously, letting God be God, not presuming to play the part of our own gods, not presuming to rely on our own wisdom, not presuming to be able to save ourselves.

But humility is also expecting God to be God. Be good! Be just! Be merciful! The faithful and humble follower of Jesus expects God to be nothing less, nothing less ... than God.

So, are you ready now to start arguing with God? Understand that if you do, it is by no means a level playing field, and that's both the bad news and the good news! Chances are that if you get into it with God, if you argue with God, you are going to be utterly overwhelmed and be left with nothing to say.

But you won't need to say anything, because you will have your answer. You will have .....