

Some things are not ours to know

Acts 1:6-9

May 8, 2005

There are many questions ...

- *Why did God let me get sick?*
- *Will God make me well if I pray to be well?*
- *Why doesn't God seem to want to answer my prayers?*
- *Why doesn't God answer my prayers for my children?*
- *Why has God brought so much unhappiness into my life?*

In my job as a pastor I get asked many questions about God, about what God has done or will do or can do. Some are personal:

• *Why doesn't God just take me? I am way past old; I've had a good life; why is God keeping me around?*

Some are more general:

• *Why do bad things happen to good people? Why do bad things happen at all?*

Some are theological:

• *Who will be saved? Only Christians? What about people who have never heard of Jesus or who believe in something else?*

Some are political:

• *Whose side is God on? Does God take sides? Is God a Republican or a Democrat?*

To most of these questions I give the same answer: *I don't know ...*

I don't know. So am I a bad pastor? There are many things I don't know that I would like to know ...

• I would like to know if my children will turn out OK, if they will be well and do well and marry well, if they will stay close to God and love God well for the rest of their lives.

• I would like to know if our church will be well, if we will continue to thrive and to serve God, to maintain our oneness as a diverse group of Christians and to draw a new generation of believers into our fellowship.

• I would like to know if God will spare us, spare our nation, from another horrific act of terror on our own soil.

• I would like to know if we will be able to find ways as a human race to take better care of the earth and its resources, if we will learn to care about what we leave behind for the next generation and the next.

• I would like to know if we will be able to find ways as a human race to live more justly, more peacefully, more equitably.

But I don't know ...

I would like to know, but I don't know. But that's OK! There is a story told about Socrates, the Greek philosopher. It seems he was very upset by the declaration of an oracle that he, Socrates, was the wisest of all people on earth. He was certain this could not be true, so he set out to prove it by interviewing the wisest men he knew. After interviewing each of them, he discovered that both he and they were alike: they all knew nothing! But at least Socrates didn't think that he knew something! So maybe he was the wisest after all!

There is wisdom in saying, *I don't know ...* And Jesus reminds us that some things are not ours to know.

Some things are not ours to know. That's what Jesus told a group of his followers who wanted to know if the time had come for Israel to reclaim its sovereignty.

It is not for you to know when ...

We don't really know what prompted their question. There is not much context here. Certainly their conversations with the resurrected Jesus would have raised their hopes that the promised Kingdom was at hand. But the question reflects a need to know the details: Where? When? How? There's nothing wrong with wanting to know the details, but we must be very careful about having to know all the details! Because some things are not ours to know.

There is a kind of faith that is based on having answers, on having an answer for every problem, an answer for every tough question. But I don't find life or faith to be that easy. My faith doesn't answer all my questions because my faith is in God, not in any religious system. God is not an answer book. God is a living being, a living person, complex and real and many-faceted, deep in wisdom, deep in feeling, supreme in power, and utterly beyond my ability to comprehend.

When people claim to have a solution to every problem, an answer for every life-situation, a word from God for every circumstance, I wonder. I wonder if the answers are shaped more by their own culture and values -- the things they can get their minds and hearts around -- than by the wisdom of the living God. Having to know, having to know the details, having to have the answers, reflects a need to be in control, to keep for myself the authority to manage my own life, and, as it often happens, everybody else's life, too!

But for me, faith is about trust, trust in God, about recognizing that God is in control, that the authority to manage my life and everybody else's properly belongs to God.

Jesus said, there are some things that are not ours to know ... and that's OK. It is not our job to have all the answers. Our job is to witness. Our job is to be witnesses for Jesus.

What is a witness? What does a witness do? Witnesses testify about the things they have seen and heard. Witnesses for Jesus testify about the things they have seen of Jesus, about the things they have heard from Jesus.

What have you seen and heard? Enough to talk about? Your job is not to sell your faith or to get everybody to believe the way you believe. Your job is not to provide a ready answer from God for every difficult question that life poses. Your job is to testify to what you have seen and heard.

What have you seen and heard? Have you seen enough and heard enough to know that Jesus is alive? And to know what that means as you think about your own future and about the future of this earth?

Have you felt the Spirit of love and joy and peace and kindness and humility -- the Spirit that comes from Jesus -- stirring in your mind and heart?

Have you seen Jesus heal real wounds -- whether they be physical wounds or emotional wounds or spiritual wounds? Have you heard Jesus ask you to be a healer of wounds?

You don't have all the answers, you won't have all the answers, you're not supposed to have all the answers! Your job is not to know it, but to do it! To do what Jesus asks you to do. To be witnesses for him, to witness to what you have seen and heard.

You don't have to have all the answers because you put your trust in God. We can never fully comprehend God but Jesus shows us enough of what God is like to be able to trust God fully. I do not know all God's ways, I cannot fathom God's mind, I will not speak for God ... but I know God is good! I know God is kind and merciful and full of grace! I know God is just! And I know *there is nothing in all creation that will ever be able to separate us from the love of God which is ours through Christ Jesus our Lord!*

There is much I don't know ... but I know enough to put my trust where it belongs!