

**‘From out of the whirlwind’ a sermon based on Job 38: 1-7 and Mark 10:35-45 preached at Knox Church Dunedin New Zealand by Kerry Enright on 17 October 2021.**

People new to the Christian faith are often surprised to find it has a depth they had not anticipated. They imagined that they would sign up to some basic beliefs and then get on with living them out. The Ten Commandments. The Beatitudes. The Golden Rule. But as they began to explore faith, they discovered many questions, and they found that some of the questions did not have answers. They discovered that being Christian involved being questioned and asking questions, as we uncover layer upon layer upon layer of truth.

The book of Job wrestles with questions – why are we in pain – why do we suffer – why do apparently good people get a poor deal – why do bad people succeed. The early part of Job is spent with the friends of Job offering pious yet unsatisfying suggestions in chapter after chapter. Then Job begins to realise the issues are bigger, wider, deeper than the suggestions his friends make.

Until finally, after many chapters, Job gets to ask God some questions. Job might have expected a nicely reasoned answer – this is God after all and isn't God the ultimate answerer. Job might have expected ... people suffer because of this ... or people experience pain because of this ... or good people aren't rewarded because of that ... or bad people succeed because ... But Job receives none of that. God answers Job with a question, and not just one question, 20 of them, one after the other. "I will question you," God says. And these are not questions with the purpose of shutting Job down or telling him to go away.

No ... God asks questions to extend Job's imagination, to open up his heart, to maintain a dialogue. "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?" "Who determined its measurements – who stretched the line upon it?" "Who laid its cornerstone when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?"

Yes, you might say, but what about that passage in 1 Corinthians 13 that suggests that one day there will be an answer. Verse 12 – "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known." People often speak of that day as the day we will finally have the answers to all our questions. But what about if, face to face and being fully known, God asks – "So what have you been doing?" What if at the end, there is another question for us?

Or you might quote the book of Revelation chapter 21 to suggest that there will be finality, an absolutely clear answer. “See the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more ...” But do you notice that what is portrayed in that verse is an ongoing relationship – God will dwell with them. They will be God’s people. What is portrayed is a relationship, and every relationship I have experienced involves questions, ongoing questions. An enduring relationship is inquisitive and curious and exploratory.

So it is possible to see the Christian faith as a dialogue of questions ... we ask ... God asks ... we ask ... God asks ... an inquiring relationship that keeps going deeper and deeper. It is called interrogative theology, a theology that wonders, that explores possibilities, that nourishes curiosity.

A person who had a great influence on my early life was a firm atheist, but he was an inquisitive person. As far as I have any inquisitiveness, I believe he helped instill that in me. When I became a Christian, I suggested to him that his inquisitiveness was precisely why I became a Christian, because I kept asking questions about whether the world view with which I had grown up was big enough. It was a kind of back-handed compliment. Sometimes people say to me “I don’t believe in God.” And I ask “What God don’t you believe in?” When people are prepared to talk, it has invariably led to a fascinating conversation in which I learned something.

Can you remember conversations that made you wonder, consider alternatives, question your choices? Not questions that accused you - why did you do that? Not hostile questions – how can you believe that? Not questions that are really final statements – why won’t you accept that? Rather with gentle curiosity that invites ongoing exploration. That is what God does to Job. Were you there at the foundation of the earth? Job is asked to imagine the time of creation, when earth began, when all came to be. And in so doing God is inviting Job out of imagining himself at the centre.

Carl Sagan is a writer, teacher and astronomer who attempts that same process through science. In his book *Pale Blue Dot*, Sagan describes a photograph taken by the Voyager 1 spacecraft that appears to portray only solid blackness. He writes that the photo was taken from 4 billion miles away from earth. Then he points out a faint, barely detectable object reflecting the sun’s light. It is earth: small, feeble, seemingly insignificant. Yet this is the place where human thought, experience and action occur. He is aiming, it seems, to push us to embrace a diminished

sense of the status of the human person in the context of a vast universe. Humankind is a small matter when it comes to the cosmos. Sagan asks us the question – Can we gain some perspective on our humanness in the context of such vastness?

Jesus often asked questions to encourage exploration. In the passage we heard read, the disciples are treating Jesus as the ready answer. “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” And Jesus responds with a question ... “What is it you want me to do for you?” And when they respond with a statement about status, Jesus asks – “Are you able to drink the cup that I drink or be baptised with the baptism that I am baptised with?” It’s a question that invites them to see beyond their own interests. And maybe that is a question that COVID is asking us. The God question might be – in the context of COVID how can we best serve others? How can we see ourselves not as the centre of life but as part of a closely connected creation? How can we live out our responsibility to others?

So I sense this ... Faith is not arriving at a definitive answer or a final conclusion. Faith is asking one question after another, prompted by God who is a question, in an eternal dialogue. St Anselm said that theology is faith seeking understanding. Note, not faith finding understanding, faith seeking understanding. And seeking is ongoing. God’s questioning of us is ongoing, peeling back layer after layer as we encounter the opportunities and challenges of life.

We can keep practising that skill here and now, with each other. Among other things that is what it means to be church. So let’s see how long we can sustain a conversation, based only on asking questions, sensing that our questions are themselves questioned by a wider, deeper, higher question, the question “God”.

## **KNOX CHURCH, DUNEDIN**

***Captivated by the vision of the realm of God,  
made known in Jesus, given in grace***



**Knox Church**

449 George Street

Dunedin

New Zealand

Ph. (03) 477 0229

[www.knoxchurch.net](http://www.knoxchurch.net)

Kerry Enright: 027 467 5542, [minister@knoxchurch.net](mailto:minister@knoxchurch.net)