

# Living the Questions

## Jesus' Divinity...

-“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1).

-“All Things were made by him; and without him was not anything made” (John 1:3).

-born of the Virgin (Luke 1:26-27)

-declared by the voices of Angels (Luke 2:9-15)

-He whom the Magi worshiped (Matthew 2:11)

-He is ministered to by angels (Matthew 4:11b, Mark 1:13b)

-to feed thousands with five loaves, to bestow living water on the Samaritan woman, to walk on the surface of the sea and to bring down the waves by rebuking the storm... (Luke 9:10-17; John 4: 7-42; Matthew 14: 22-33, John 6:16-21; Matthew 8: 23-27)

-to raise Lazarus from the dead (John 11:43-44)

-To make all the elements tremble after light had been changed into darkness (after the crucifixion) (Matthew 27: 50-53, Luke 23: 44-46)

-To open the gates of paradise to the faith of the robber (Luke 23: 39-43)

-“I and the Father (God) are one” (John 10:30)

## Jesus' humanity...

-“The word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.” (John 1:14)

-“(He was) born of a woman, born under the law” (Galatians 4:4)

-born of the flesh (Luke 2:7)

-demonstrated by a lowly cradle (Luke 2:16)

-He whom Herod tried to slay (Matthew 2:16-18)

-He is tempted by the devil (Matthew 4: 3-11, Mark 1: 12-13, Luke 4: 3-13)

-...to hunger, to thirst, to be weary and to sleep (Matthew 21:18; John 19:28; John 4:6; Matthew 8:24b)

-to weep with feeling of pity over a dead friend (John 11:35)

-To hang on the cross (Matthew 27:35, Mark 15:25, Luke 23:33)

-To be pierced with nails (John 20:25)

- “The Father (God) is greater than I” (John 14:28)

## **Situation**

Throughout the world today there is an increase in religious fundamentalism. Many of the fastest growing churches are the mega-churches with contemporary music and skillful marketing. Yet beneath the sermons preached is toxic theology. One truth....and conveniently it happens to be my truth. Those who don't believe the way I do will burn in hell. As one child put it, "Believe that Jesus loves you or burn in hell forever."

When we deny others access to God, we dehumanize them, we escalate violence, and we increase the potential for war.

## **Complication**

The world has become increasingly complicated and ambiguous and in this context certainty is very appealing. When everything around us is changing and everywhere we look there are shifting sands, we want to hold onto something that will not change. We want to hold onto absolute truth--something that will keep the chaos at bay. For Christian Fundamentalists, certainty is the name of the game.

It is hard to have dialogue with fundamentalists who will not budge on their decrees set in stone. How can we engage in rational dialogue with a man like the president of Iran, who believes that Armageddon is near and that it is his duty to accelerate it? How can Israel negotiate with people who are certain their instructions come from heaven and so decree that Israel must not exist in Muslim lands? How can we negotiate with fundamentalist Jews who claim that the West Bank is theirs forever by biblical mandate? How can we negotiate with fundamentalist Christians who believe that Israel's expansion is a biblical necessity? This fundamentalist mindset is exasperating.

## **Resolution**

But, there is a way out of the absolute certainty, black & white, right and wrong, good versus evil mentality. The way out of the fundamentalist quagmire will come from the only place it can come from—the minds and souls of people of faith. It will come from moderate Muslims, tolerant Jews, and humble Christians. The alternative to the rigid fundamentalist mindset is something called spiritual humility. Fundamentalism is not the only valid form of faith. Far from it.

There is our balanced main line form of faith that does not see Jesus as God period, end of story. There is ambiguity and mystery in Jesus. Jesus was not only God. Jesus was also human and that makes him mysterious. There is little that comes close to the mystery of the incarnation.

When we read the gospels carefully Jesus is hard to pin down. Sometimes he behaves as a human would and other times he behaves as we would expect God to behave. Cursing the fig tree & "my God my God why forsaken me" ....examples of humanity...walking on water and miraculous healings....examples of Divinity.

Jesus somehow dances between being God on the one hand and being human on the other. He is never exclusively God or exclusively human. He is God in human form. There is always this wrestling match between the Divinity and humanity. It is tempting to try to arrive at finality. But, there is always this dynamic flow between the two. This is a paradox for us. And there are many questions that arise as a result of this paradox.

Fundamentalists will tell us that Jesus is God period, end of story. And New Age Christians will tell us that Jesus is human period, end of story. But the middle ground that we stand on is that Jesus is God and human at the same time. This is main line Christian tradition at its best.

This dynamic creates some space in our minds. We resist the temptation to come to finality. We have the humility to claim that we know God's human form. But we don't take the next arrogant step and say we have truth in a corner—that we know who God is in an ultimate sense. We don't know. Ultimately God is beyond category. So, we claim God's human form and that is enough for us.

So, our tradition at its best claims that God has come to us in human form. But, we don't rule out the possibility that God is available to the human family in other forms. Because God is spirit and can use many different forms including art, music, nature, and the religious expressions of other cultures.

There is precedent for this understanding in the New Testament. In First Peter, Peter exclaims that anywhere in the world if someone fears God and does what is right that they will be accepted by God.

We don't have a corner on the truth. There are many questions in our tradition that remain unanswered. There is something powerful about living the questions, about being honest enough to doubt at times. The power of this approach is that there is humility in it. And according to the Old Testament, God requires humility.

We leave room for uncertainty and this comes from our tradition. In our kind of faith questions are encouraged and doubt is not a threat. If we have never doubted, how can we say we have really believed? True belief is not about blind submission. Genuine faith wrestles with doubts. And we know that as humans we will never know God in God's entirety. That is beyond us. We don't have access to ultimate truth. Acknowledging this is the essence of humility. It is also a way out of the fundamentalism and escalating violence in the world today

Jesus is God.....and human. This is the unique claim of our faith. And it is enough for us. We don't need to know the whole truth. That would be presumptuous and hopelessly proud. We only need to hold onto Jesus, God in human form.

## **Celebration**

We celebrate the paradox of Jesus and we celebrate that we have not found all the answers. Thank God for that. We are still asking questions. Thank God for that. We celebrate mystery. We celebrate that Jesus is both God and human at the same time. We celebrate the expanse of stars in the night sky. We celebrate the sun as it comes up every morning with its hues of red, orange, purple, and yellow. We celebrate the song bird as she sings her melody on the tree branch in our backyard. And we also celebrate Jesus who was found in a cradle wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. Through Jesus, God suckled, God wept, God slept, God died. Through Jesus, God has become intimate with everything human.

We are proud that our faith lives the questions and celebrates mystery—that there are still times when we are awestruck and speechless like a child. Somewhere between the awestruck and speechless child.....and Jesus....is where all the magic happens.

Amen.