

We often want to know more, to know the rest of the story. We want to know what is going on and why. What is happening? From time to time commercials or cartoons try to tell us what our animals are thinking. Do they really know? At home, Butterscotch always gets up and looks toward the kitchen whenever the refrigerator is opened. I wonder...

The other day on our way to Pre-K we passed a young girl waiting for her bus. We see her most days but as we were going by suddenly she jumped back from the road. She looked afraid and was looking in the sky. Diane watched and noted that a hawk had just landed on the wires above her head. It was enough to cause her to be wary of what might happen. Now, I am glad we saw what was happening and knew what caused her sudden reaction and fear. Or, we would want more answers.

Could John be the Messiah? Luke writes that all were asking, wondering. They wanted answers. Are you the One, the Messiah? They had never seen a prophet. What was John all about? They had heard or read the stories about prophets but there had been none on the scene for centuries. They knew about Isaiah, Jeremiah, Micah, etc., but they are just stories from their past. Now, John comes dressed in strange garb, with an unusual diet and calling down words of judgment. Even the religious leaders were having questions. What are you doing? Why do we need to get our house in order?

John's answers may have brought more questions. No, John was not the Messiah. But, he was preparing the way for the coming of the Messiah. Well then, when is the Messiah coming? What will he be like? John doesn't know. He is only called to prepare the way. He knows what his task is but that is all he knows. And, like the other prophets he sees the Messiah coming in judgment. The image he uses in Luke is one of a winnowing fork that separates the good wheat from the chaff, the good from the bad. Maybe the mountains will tremble, the sky light up with lightning. They are the images they have from the former prophets.

Jesus comes. He is not what John or the world expected. He looks normal, does not dress like John or act like they have heard the prophets act. He comes wanting John to baptize him. Should the Messiah need to be baptized? Should it not be the other way around? Questions and more questions. And, the mountains do not tremble or a lion appear. Just a dove (an image of peace) and a word, "This is my Son, I am proud of him." More answers needed.

We still want answers. The question asked a few years back should still be asked today, "What would Jesus do?" Too often we get it wrong, we try to make God in our image, in our idea of what God should be like. Facebook this past week had articles by two mega pastors trying to justify why they need private aircraft to fly around the country. Both said that one reason was, "So that they don't have to mingle with 'demon' folk who fly commercial aircraft". So, I guess we are all demons if we can't afford to fly on private planes. What would Jesus do? I suspect he would delight in flying economy and meeting and greeting and interacting with the common demons who are flying with him. He didn't mind our blemishes and imperfections.

Now, we might yell, "we are not like that." But, we don't have the platform that the others do. It is hard for us to counter the image they are projecting on the world. They are hurting the Church of Christ.

We live in a world seeking answers. There are more and more spiritual seekers, looking and seeking to find answers to life, etc. They are seeking the Christ they read about in the New Testament — he still does draw people to himself. Maybe it is time more Christians read the New Testament again, looking at what Jesus really was about. Why? Because, sadly, many of

these folk are saying that they do not find much of Christ in many congregations. When they come for answers they get directions. Do this and this. Don't ask questions, just blindly obey. I am right, trust me. I will tell you what to do, what to believe, etc. How to live and act.

Jesus' words were that we are to come to him and in coming to him find the rest that we need. In Jesus we should find a quiet place. A place of refuge and a place of prayer. Many are now seeking more traditional worship experiences. They want the symbols, the prayers, the mystery of faith. They are seeking the mystical, the holy. And, what they are finding is shouting, clapping, performance rather than worship. Not finding the Christ they are looking for in churches — they look in other areas.

A leading theological educator has noted, "Students increasingly study theology not because they know who they are meant to be, but in order to find out." We are not prepared for the seekers. Or, for the questions that often come with those who are seeking. We have been told far too long that questions are wrong. We have the right answers don't question us. Yet, we live in a world, like John's, where more and more are asking questions and seeking answers to questions that are still, in many ways, a mystery.

John did not have the answers. He was only preparing the way for the One who was to come. He knew that the answers would come when the Messiah came. And, when the Messiah came the world was not ready for him. They were not prepared for the *mystery* of mercy and grace, love and forgiveness. The mountains did not tremble, a dove appeared adding more to the mystery.

Rowen Atkinson (a.k.a. Mr. Bean) was in a movie, "Keeping Mum." He plays the vicar of a small parish in England with a dysfunctional family and congregation. He is struggling with his faith, trying to keep his family and parish together. He is also the scheduled speaker at a denominational gathering. He has his speech to prepare and the world is falling apart around him. As he stumbles through his address, as he reflects on faith, love and hope that the Gospels offer (all things he is questioning) he comes with the conclusion: "It is a mystery, live with it."

Maybe it is time we again embrace the mystery of our faith. There are some questions we cannot answer. We move on in faith, allowing the mystery to be just that, mysterious.

NIV, New International Bible Society, Zondervan, 1973, 1978, 1985
NRSV, Division of Christian Education, NCC, 1989