

## Exploring Faith

January 12 – February 23, 2020

*“Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” – Matthew 11:3*

Some say that faith is the opposite of doubt, that certainty means having no questions. But this is not God’s way. You can trust in God *and* have lots of questions about life and faith. Faith and doubt side by side, hand in hand. They are not mutually exclusive. Without questions, our faith becomes stagnant, we become so sure in ourselves we lose sight of God. We come with our questions, exploring them together, seeing where the journey takes us.

### January 12 – Are you sure about that?

*“I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” – Matthew 3:14*

Matthew 3:13-17; Isaiah 42:1-9

Is it ok to ask questions? John the Baptist asks Jesus if this is really what they should be doing. Isaiah presents a vision that elicits questions of when and how and is it real. Many faithful seekers came to Jesus with questions and we are invited too.

### January 19 – God Who?

*“I Am Who I Am.” – Exodus 3:14*

Genesis 1:27; Exodus 3:13-15; Psalm 139:7-12

What is God and is He a girl or boy? Generations have written on the nature of God and, still, mystery remains. So, we fall back on what we are familiar with. We are created in the image of God and sometimes we create God in our own image. Our language forces us to choose characteristics, particularly gender. All are created in God’s image; God is without gender and yet holds all gender.

## **January 26 – Are we cannibals?**

*“Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life” – John 6:54*

John 6:41-59; Deuteronomy 12:23; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17

What does Jesus mean when he tells us to eat his flesh and drink his blood? In the gospel of John, Jesus speaks of himself as the bread of life. The Word became flesh and it feeds the world. Blood is the source of all life and traditionally forbidden to consume. Yet, in the blood of the new covenant we receive transformed life. This is the language of the Table. These are signs of new life.

## **February 2 – What is salvation?**

*“there is no other name under heaven...by which we must be saved” – Acts 4:12*

John 14:1-7, Acts 4:8-12

There are many who would lay out a particular set of steps, each of which must be completed in order, to ensure one's salvation. But salvation is a gift. It is by God's grace, proclaimed through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, that we are saved. There is no perfect formula that earns us everlasting life. When we respond to the gift freely given our lives are transformed.

## **February 9 – Why is there pain and suffering?**

*“Why, O LORD, do you stand far off?” – Psalm 10:1*

1 Kings 17:1-12; Psalm 10:1-6

Ours is a loving God. How can such terrible problems and illnesses happen to innocent, especially young people? God's love is deep, yet we turn from God. Our world is broken, we are broken, and it leads to the pain and suffering of many. Through it all God is with us, drawing us toward wholeness, but it cannot negate fully the brokenness in which we dwell.

## **February 16 – Where was God at the crucifixion?**

*“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” – Mark 15:34*

Mark 15:25-39; Psalm 22:1-5

Why did Jesus say that God had forsaken him? Why would God have abandoned Jesus especially on the cross? Why wouldn't Jesus feel abandoned in the midst of horror and pain? In the midst of his most desperate moment Jesus reached for and found strength in scripture, in scripture that creates space for our pain. Where are you God, because I know you're there. Why me God, because I know you love me. Why this brokenness God, because I know you love the world. Jesus speaks his pain and our pain and in doing so points to the eternal love of God that is with us through good and bad.

## **February 23 – What are the prophets saying?**

*“Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it” – Revelation 1:3*

Revelation 1:1-3, 13:1-4; Isaiah 10:1-7

What are we to believe about prophesy in the Bible? What about people who think prophecy is being fulfilled in current politics? Prophets in the biblical tradition are not interested in divining the future. They are there to speak truth to power and hope to the oppressed. They call on governments, leaders, and peoples to change their ways. Many over the centuries have sought to tie current events to prophets' words in order to prove the coming of God's fullness. While it is good and helpful to connect scripture to our lives, creating these connections can sometimes lead us to ignore the deep criticisms of power that are inherent in all these words.