
15TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

SEPTEMBER 1, 2013

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

Pastor Jim Dunn

(Quotes are from Robert Kolb's article in the 2002 *Lutheran Quarterly* titled *Luther's Theology of the Cross* and from Travis Scholl's sermon help on Proverbs 25:2-10 for the 15th Sunday after Pentecost in 2010 *Concordia Journal*)

Proverbs 25:2-10

- 2** It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of kings is to search things out.
- 3** As the heavens for height, and the earth for depth so the heart of kings is unsearchable.
- 4** Take away the dross from the silver and the smith has material for a vessel;
- 5** take away the wicked from the presence of the king and his throne will be established in righteousness.
- 6** Do not put yourself forward in the king's presence or stand in the place of the great,
- 7** for it is better to be told, "Come up here," than to be put lower in the presence of a noble. What your eyes have seen
- 8** do not hastily bring into court, for what will you do in the end, when your neighbor puts you to shame?
- 9** Argue your case with your neighbor himself and do not reveal another's secret,
- 10** lest he who hears you bring shame upon you and your ill repute have no end.
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It's been said that the last frontier is the human brain. But neuroscientists like Emily Rogalski are tackling that frontier. Rogalski wants to know why some 80-year-olds have strong memories. So, she began recruiting volunteers age 80 and up from the Chicago area to test their memories. The volunteers were given a barrage of tests. Participants had to memorize a list of random words and recall the words some time later. Or they listened to stories and were later tested on the many small details in them.

What Rogalski found was that 10% of the participants still had outstanding memories. This group Rogalski calls "superagers." Her next step was to see if the brains of the superagers looked any different than those of other 80-year-olds. Each superager was given several MRI scans. Rogalski then analyzed the brain pictures, exploring the outer layer of the brain called the cortex, which is critical for thinking and memory. The thickness of the cortex indicates the health of the brain. In Alzheimer's, for example, the cortex gets thinner and shrinks. But what she found was that the cortex of a superager looks more like that of a 50-year-old. The question is, 'Why?' That's what Rogalski is still exploring.

It is in our nature to explore, to research, to investigate, to "search things out." Solomon wrote, "It is the glory of kings to search things out." (Proverbs 25:2) That is true. Certainly, wise King Solomon searched out many things. Yet, this is true of almost all of us humans. We search things out. As children, we curiously ask, 'Why is the sky blue? What's on the other side of that mountain? What do my dreams mean?' As adults, we ask, 'Where did we come from? What is the meaning of my life? What does it mean to be human? Who am I? What am I supposed to do with my life? What will become of me when I die?'

We search things out...in our faith. So, we ask: Why are some saved and not others? Does God predestine some to eternal life and predestine the rest to eternal death? Why is there evil, and where did it come from? Why do bad things happen to good people, and why do bad people prosper? Why did God take my child from me? Why are my prayers not being answered? Why am I making the same mistakes again? Why did I trust that person? I should have known better. Where is God when I am afraid? Where is God when I am in pain? Why is my body failing me? Why is my memory failing me? Why did my good intentions yield such bad results? Why did God make me like this? We search things out. We ask questions and seek answers.

But "it is the glory of God to conceal things (Proverbs 25:2)," Solomon writes. Does that mean God won't answer all our questions? Yes, that's what it means. Job asked, "Why am I suffering so terribly, God, when I have been faithful to you?" Paul raises the question, "Why do the Gentiles respond to Jesus with faith, but the majority of Jews do not accept their own Messiah?" The disciples asked regarding the man born blind, "Who is the cause of his blindness? Who sinned? Him or his parents?" The widow of Zarephath, the woman of the flour and oil that did not run out, when her son died, asked Elijah, "What do you have against me? Did you come to me for help just to remind me of my sin?" Jesus asked from the cross, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?" Some received answers, though they were not always satisfying answers. Others received no answer at all. For, "it is the glory of God to conceal things."

Our response to that is not good. In response to the lack of answers, many today view God as the epitome of a modern father: neglectful, absent, too little concerned, too busy to answer our questions. Or, we are tempted to concoct answers for our unanswered questions. Like, when we say that God is responsible for the evil that happens to us. Or, we say that we humans are responsible for evil entering the world. Or, we say that God wants to do something about evil, but there's a limit to His power. Or, we say that God's mercy depends on our actions or on how much we pray. Or, we get down on ourselves and call ourselves 'idiot' or 'stupid.' Or, we think too highly of ourselves and believe that we can be repaired, improved, that we can cure ourselves with maybe just a little bit of help from God if we just stretch a little higher, try a little harder, come a little closer to Him. The thing is, none of those things are true. The thing is, "it is the glory of God to conceal things," as it says here in Proverbs. And again in Isaiah it says, "Truly, You are a God who hides Himself, O God and Savior of Israel." (Isaiah 45:15) God withholds answers, "He hides Himself, in order to show us where He is to be found and who He really is." (Kolb)

He tells us where He is to be found. "He tells us to not put ourselves forward in the king's presence or stand in the place of the great (Prov. 25:6). He says that we are to go and sit in the lowest place (Luke 14:10). That's not merely a lesson on humility. It is *in the lowest place* that God is to be found" (Scholl): "as a baby in a crib, as a criminal on a gallows, as a corpse in a grave." (Kolb) God has hidden Himself, has hidden His power and glory behind a curtain, and that curtain is Jesus on the cross, Christ and Him crucified. As Jesus explained to Philip, "If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father." (John 14:9) As John says, "No one has seen God, but Jesus has made Him known." (John 1:18) Jesus on the cross has made God known, "a God with holes...in His hands, feet, and side. If we could see past the curtain to what is supposed to be behind it, then we wouldn't have to look at the cross." (Kolb) But at the cross is where God wants to be found.

And it's at the cross that He shows us who He really is. "The cross of Jesus doesn't answer all our questions. But the cross assures us we never have to wonder about how God regards us or anyone. The cross was not an instrument of torture. It was an instrument of death. The death of Jesus for all reveals that God regards all with love and mercy." (Kolb) God really is love. People say, 'Well, if God is love, why is there evil in the world?' God does not answer that question, not for Job nor for us. Instead, "evil, death, even sometimes of children, and disgust with ourselves and our sins, and discouragement and the deterioration of our bodies and minds drive us to the cross. To see the consequences of evil and God's anger towards our sins and to see *evil and sin nailed to that cross*." (Kolb) God wants us to have life. The proof of that is Jesus' resurrection.

At the cross we see God as He really is, and we see ourselves as we really are: broken "beyond repair, self-improvement, or self-cure. That's why Jesus says, 'You must be born anew' (John 3:3)." (Kolb) As new as when the Lord created Adam and Eve. "The sinner must die eternally or baptismally. And because sin is a continuing force in our lives, the rhythm of daily repentance leads us again and again to the cross, to die to sin and to be raised up a new creation." (Kolb) Not an idiot. Not a stupid - but a new creation in Christ - a child of God. Set free to trust God, to trust that God is with us, even when we don't have answers, because we can see Him from the foot of the cross. Amen