

## Test Questions: facing the hard cold facts? 24 Pentecost A

Why do people test one another with questions? Questions are important to ask if the truth is to be discovered. I asked the children what would be the greatest thing their parents could ask them to do. What kinds of questions have you asked lately? There are simple questions we ask when we just want to get to know someone. Questions that test knowledge can be difficult to answer. They tend to focus on a particular subject we may have little experience in. There are many motives for questions and there are questions that are meant to trap, trip or trump a person.

Jesus had a question put to Him that was meant to test in the effort to trap, trip and maybe trump Him as a prophet. He had just silenced leaders of the Temple and now the lawyers wanted to take their shot. "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" That sounds like an innocent enough question, don't you think? One would suppose that the lawyers already knew the answer. One could suppose that the greatest commandment might have to do with God. And that is exactly what Jesus says, "You shall love the Lord, your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment." Jesus adds the next great commandment, "And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

Were the lawyers surprised by His answer? Not a bit. They had been through Hebrew school. They knew that the two greatest commandments came from the Old Testament books of Exodus (chapter 20) and Leviticus (chapter 19). These two precepts were as intimate as a hot dog in a toasted bun! God first – man second. And an overriding commandment over both is in the very first verse of our first lesson, "You shall be holy, for I the LORD, your God am holy." Ironically, the only proverb I could find to express what God is saying to us is, "Give the devil his due." Man must admit that God knows what is best. And the One who made man tells him, "You SHALL..." Holiness is not an option if we want to make our bed with God. We can read for ourselves the examples given in the first lesson that defines what it means to be holy – they all deal with relationships with our neighbor, our relatives and our God. We see that being holy includes rebuking bad behavior in our neighbor. That's as hard as it gets!

All this comes from one little question having to do with obedience. Did Jesus have any test questions for these Pharisaical lawyers? Absolutely! Here again is the humor in the Bible that makes me laugh and squirm 'cause it's talking about faith. He asks them, "What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?" Here again Jesus is referring to scripture truths they should know. Jesus takes the testing and He turns the tables on the lawyers. They said to Him, "The son of David." Jesus replies, "How is it then, that David, by the Spirit, calls

him Lord, saying, 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet"'?"

If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be David's son?" The curtain closes, the action on the stage is cut and the Pharisees are shut up!

"Who is this guy? Who does He think He is?"

Jesus says, "Trick or treat! It's God!" No longer is Jesus disguised in their mind or in their sight. The author of the commandments just did them one better. The hot dog just jumped out of the bun. And it was too hot to swallow.

What makes me squirm is the thought that Jesus could be disguised as my neighbor or one of you, or my kids, cousins or even a stranger. Jesus is right under my nose and He is so obvious. The answer to my greatest questions is hidden in my relationships with the people He has put in my life. And the answers to my questions are not in academics or in the mystics. The answers are blowing in the wind and the wind is blowing all around us.

It's dangerous to point fingers when we talk about commandments. The ten greatest ever written all have to do with our relationship with God and our relationship with each other. One of them says, "You shall not steal." We would suppose that applies to stealing from another person but common sense applies it to business, place of work, family and of course, it applies to stealing from God. Stealing from God? What could I steal from God? I leave you with that test question. The answer is between you and Him.

Trick or treat! Everyone wants the treat, but the trick is that to get to the treat we all like Jesus will be tested. Faith once tested is strong enough to stand again and be ready for the next one. Like Jesus we will overcome. May God help us all to be like Him in every trial we face. I will, with God's help. Will you? Amen