

Sharing the Good News

from the pen of the Mission Interpreter



September 4, 2022, Vol. 2, Issue 31

Freed to Ask Difficult Questions (Part 3)

What if asking difficult questions were part of our order of service during worship, an opportunity for holy acknowledgment that we are out of our depth?

Of course, there are liturgical rites for asking questions in ELCA: The Service of Baptism and the Affirmation of Faith (Confirmation). The questions posed in these moments of worship may appear rhetorical. But one hopes that, prior to baptismal and confirmation services, candidates or their sponsors have been allowed to ask questions, learn, challenge and then come to a conclusion or two, not least about what a baptismal identity means. These worship services provide an occasion for us to affirm, “Yes, I’ll throw my lot in with that. This understanding of God and faith and life and community and myself makes sense to me, resonates with me, claims me, calls me.” These liturgical questions, then, are not just rhetorical—they are sincere because embedded in them are claims and a framework for determining who we are and how we live.

Everyone asks questions from their own perspective, but the more one recognizes that perspective, the more one realizes how it changes both the question and how the answer is interpreted. Baptized and engaged Christians have a specific framework within which they question. Communally we believe that Jesus lived among us, healing the sick, feeding the hungry, forgiving the wicked and extolling the faithful. He ate and drank with gusto, taught and was taught, and welcomed. He was killed—partly for asking questions that roiled people in power—and we believe he was raised from the dead. That resurrection assures that nothing—not even the most dangerous questions—can separate us from God.

Such assurance frees us, not only from fear, sin and death, but also from hesitancy to ask hard questions, uncertain questions, audacious questions, questions born of grief, wonder, humility. So, too, are we freed to welcome not only those questions but also the answers and their implications. In this way we can confidently say, “This what I believe—and maybe there’s more to it than that.”

When we ask questions, we open ourselves not to the devil but to the possibility of God expanding our understanding and bringing about something new in ourselves and in the life of the church.

Amen.

Anna Madsen in *Living Lutheran* (April, 2022)