

The Ongoing Quest

September 2020 (30 August - 3 October)



This month we come to God with our questions.

Through the Bible and in the power of the Holy Spirit we are invited into a heavenly conversation with God and with one another spanning thousands of years. The Bible is a rich book full of answers but it's even more full of questions — to spur us on and shape us as disciples. In prayerful community, supporting one another and with the guidance of the Trinity, we continually learn new things about holiness and humanity.

In the beginning was the question.
In the beginning was the quest.
The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.
We became part of the quest as the question dwelt with us.

And it continues to dwell in us and through us...

There are things we know about God and creation and love and humanity.
And there's things we are still figuring out.
Our search for God, for meaning, for understanding is an unfinished journey this side of eternity.

It's an ongoing quest.

Each week of the theme runs Sunday-Saturday and has its own subtheme, which contains daily Bible readings and thought triggers.

Burning up (30 August)

Like Moses toasting his toes in front of the burning bush, we sometimes find ourselves hopping from foot to foot, buying time by asking God's questions. 'Why this? Why that? Surely not me? Surely not now?' But when we catch the spark and starting burning with enthusiasm our questions don't stop, they just become more practical and more personal...

1. Exodus 3:1-15

1. **Burning questions. Calling: curiosity and doubt.** Moses has two questions: 'What's going on with this new thing I've noticed?', 'Who am I to take this on?' These are classic questions when God is calling us to undertake something new.

2. Psalm 105:1-6

2. **Burning enthusiasm.** Remembering God's wonderful works.

3. Jeremiah 15:15-21

3. **Burning indignation.** Honest words before the Creator.

4. Psalm 26

4. **Burning up.** Go on — test me!

5. Romans 12: 9-21

5. **Burning love.** Loving our enemies to overcome evil with Good.

6. Matthew 16: 21-28

6. **Burning words.** 'Get behind me, Satan!' is one of the harshest burns in the Bible. Sometimes those at the heart of things who are well-meaning but who have the wrong priorities and focus do more to impede a mission than antagonists from the outside.

7. Jeremiah 20: 7-18

7. **Burning Bones.** The shift from verse 13 to 14 is mind blowing and heartbreaking as Jeremiah has an existential crisis asking why he even exists — even as he feels a burning passion for God. These words capture the universal human condition of a desire for meaning and connection and a fear of loss and abandonment.

I've got a few questions... (6 September)

Not shying away from complexity. In our life, in our faith, in our communities we encounter many questions. Sometimes these questions don't have easy or quick answers. And that's okay. Part of the quest can be living with the questions and allowing them to shape you as a disciple of God.

1. Exodus 12:
1-14

2. Psalm 149

3. Ezekiel 33:
7-11

4. Psalm
119: 33-40

5. Romans 13:
8-14

6. Matthew
18: 15-20

7. Luke 18:
18-30

1. **'Why is tonight different from all other nights?'** In Jewish tradition at the Passover Seder there are a series of questions asked by the youngest children. Through reliving the story everyone is reminded why the meal is shared in particular ways. When we come to the Bible we often find questions as well as answers. Through the power of the Holy Spirit we can join a conversation thousands of years old on what it means to be a child of God.
2. **A two edged sword?** What to make of the bloodthirsty turn in the second half of verse 6? Do we sometimes make the mistake with this — and other texts — of assuming that this was a literal call to arms when there is actually something more artistic going on? This psalm is poetry, from a marginalised and oppressed group who are fired up and ready to stand up for what they believe in. But how do we reconcile the violent imagery with the God of love?
3. **Confronting wickedness rather than turning away.** It is easier to ignore oppression and injustice than to challenge it. If cruelty doesn't seem to directly affect us it is all too tempting not to confront the wronging and leave in place systems that trap persecutor and persecuted. But we are one human family and we are all connected and responsible for one another.
4. **Asking God for guidance.** As we journey sometimes it's not enough to know where we are going, we have to know *how* to get there.
5. **What does the PPE of light look like?** Taking inspiration from Ephesians 6:10-18, consider what the Personal Protective Equipment of light looks like.
6. **We're meant to do this together...** The message here is one of vertical partnership with heaven and horizontal partnership with one another. Why then do we so often insist on going it alone and doing it our own way?
7. **Reframing our questions.** It's not about what **you** need to do to inherit eternal life. It's about what **God** has done. What is impossible for mortals is possible for God.

Who are you? (13 September)

When it comes down to it: Who am I? And who are you? Who who are we? Oh, and who is God?

1. Exodus 14: 19-31
 2. Psalm 114
 3. Exodus 15:1-11, 20-21
 4. Genesis 50: 15-21
 5. Psalm 103
 6. Romans 14: 1-12
 7. Matthew 18: 21-22
1. **A spine tingling moment of self-discovery.** Imagine that... walking between colossal static waves.
 2. **Trembling at the presence of the Lord.** The magnitude of God.
 3. **Who is like you God?** Well, nobody.
 4. **"Am I in the place of God?"** Not abusing our power over others.
 5. **Who forgives all your iniquity?** Realising that in God's identity we live our lives in the context of steadfast love.
 6. **Less 'Who are you?' and more 'Who are you?'** Choosing to pass on passing on judgement.
 7. **What about them? How often should I forgive?** How long is a piece of string? How long is the string that weaves all of us into a network of grace? Very, very long.

Bringing it all before God (20 September)

There are times when we just need to stop and bring it all before God. Our doubts, our questions, our triumphs, our confusion, our frustration.

1. Exodus 16: 2-15

1. **Draw near to the LORD, for he has heard your complaining.** God listens to our moans, grumbles, whines and whinges. We can bring it all.

2. Psalm 105: 37-45

2. **Taking time with God to remember the good things.** Telling and retelling the story.

3. Jonah 3:10-4:11

3. **Is it right for you to be angry?** We can bring all our emotions to God and the Bible is full of examples of raw feelings directed at God. But we should question our anger. Where is it coming from? Are we angry about the right things?

4. Psalm 145: 1-8

4. **Are we really lauding God's work from generation to generation?** Our community of believers isn't just geographical — it's temporal stretching back and forward through the generations. Are we doing our bit in keeping the link going?

5. Philippians 1:21-30

5. **Disunity not struggles are the threat here.** We can't avoid struggle but we can minimise strife! By focusing on what really matters and working side by side.

6. Matthew 20: 1-16

6. **'Why are you standing here idle all day?'** Reflections on this reading often focus on the grumbling of the early workers. This time around let's look at the above question put to the workless workers. When asked why they are idle they immediately fire back that nobody has asked them to do anything. Who are the idle workers that no one is bringing in, involving — finding a place for? How can we bring it all before God if we're not all here?

7. Hebrews 4: 14-16

7. **Approaching the throne of Grace.** Jesus knows what it is to live life in all its complexity and wonder. And he invites us to come as we are.

Answers, and more questions (27 September)

Questions, answers, and answers in the form of a question. We have got to the plenary. Our God The Lord Almighty invites us into a dialogue. Time for a bit of a Q and A, and Q, and A, and Q...

- 1. Exodus 17:**
1-7
 - 1. Is the LORD among us or not?** Striking the rock.
 - 'On that day I will answer'.** In the 'now and not yet', living with the question.
- 2. Hosea 2:**
16-23
 - 3. Is it not your ways that are unfair?** Having our questions turned back around on us.
 - 4. Asking for pardon.** Ancient words of confession.
- 3. Ezekiel**
18:1-4,
25-32
 - 5. Our interests are bundled up in the interests of others.** Can we really be like Jesus?
 - 6. Don't be bland.** When it comes to answering questions people have about our faith we should season our conversations with grace, and honesty, and humility. We can be honest about our feelings, our doubts, and our own questions. We shouldn't rush to give bland, insincere answers.
- 4. Psalm**
25:1-12
 - 7. Answering a question with another question.** We are often told that if we want to know what God is like we should look to Jesus in the Gospels. How does Jesus often answer a question — with another question, or a story, or both! Sometimes God answers our questions in unexpected ways by encouraging us to follow a different path or to dig into a deeper story.
- 5. Philippians**
2: 1-13
- 6. Colossians**
4: 2-6
- 7. Matthew 21:**
23-32