

REAL QUESTIONS, REAL FAITH +++

PASTOR GREG GRIFFITH

Well, good morning, church. Good morning. It is an exciting day because it is our first ever asking for a friend live. And so your questions from any campus may be answered today. We'll try to get through them. We know that there'll be a lot of them. We're gonna try to get through as many as we can today, but we're excited for this and we wanna invite you to go ahead and start texting in questions now. That's an easy thing to do, 94,000 asking, and then we'll get those questions in there and get going.

Over the past few weeks, we've been asking questions. Does God love me? Does God love them? What about the future? I don't know if I have hope for the future. And here's the thing that I think sometimes happens. I think for a lot of Christians, a lot of times, we wonder, can I ask God? Is it okay to have a question for God? What if I don't understand? What if I don't like the answer? What if there isn't an answer?

And first of all, let me say this to you. It is absolutely okay to ask God questions. Matter of fact, we should ask God questions. Questions about faith are not a sign of weakness. They are a sign of an engaged faith. When we look at the scriptures, there's a lot of questions to be asked because our minds ask all sorts of questions and go all sorts of ways. And we have a view of life experience that brings us into proximity. Well, what about these things? And so they're normal and they're an engaged faith. So I wanna challenge you today, always be asking questions about your faith. It's good and healthy to ask God.

Now also understand this, there are some questions that we may ask God that we go, I don't know, and we'll never know. So an easy question where that's the truth, and I won't spend a lot of time because we just don't know, so you don't need to hear me talk a lot about something we don't know, is the question if someone said to me today, hey, when will Jesus come back? I don't know. The scriptures are clear, we don't know.

And if I were to say to you, here's one thing I do know, two things I know actually: number one, he is coming back and it will be soon, so be ready. And number two, anyone on the face of the earth that is not named Jesus of Nazareth, who has died and risen from the dead, or the Father or the Spirit, who tries to say Jesus will come back on this date at this time, is a liar. That I do know. Because Christ was even clear, he said he doesn't even know when it will happen while he was here on earth.

So it's okay to not know all the answers. And actually, if you find someone who says, I know everything, go ahead and ask me, I'm gonna say, you don't have the mind of God. You don't know everything. But we can always look for answers through the scriptures. And what do the scriptures say? So I think we're ready to dive in, ask some questions for a friend from God and see what we learn about Jesus and about each other today.

All right, so question number one, ready? Let's jump into this, settle in and jump in and God's got something.

So what happens immediately after a believer dies and can that person see us here on earth? Will we see our loved ones in heaven? There are three questions. I laughed, one of our production people who's putting all this together, they said, you know, here's what I love about Lutherans. There's no like simple two or three word questions, like they're all paragraphs and getting everything in. And it's true, Lutherans, we love words.

Okay, so let's dive into this one. First part of this question is what happens immediately after a believer dies? That's a really great question. And we're gonna always use the scriptures to guide us and form us in what we believe because this is the word of God. This is where we discover who God is, who we are. This is our truth and because this is his truth, okay?

And so what happens when a believer dies? Well, Jesus said to the thief on the cross, today you will be with me in paradise. We also see that Jesus on the mountain of transfiguration encountered Moses and Elijah. So we do know that the soul of a believer goes to heaven.

But also what happens when a believer dies? Well, there is a body. Grandma Schlutenschlager is right there in the coffin or in the ground. And so the body is there. We also know that Jesus is returning to raise the living and the dead.

And so what happens when a person dies is their soul, according to the scriptures, goes to heaven and they experience a glory of God. It is not the full glory of God because the full glory of God is when Christ returns again and ushers in the new heaven and the new earth when our bodies will be reunited with our souls.

A little quick, very quick side note. I had the opportunity a few times to go to France and I will tell you the best place to go in Paris and it's not the Louvre. I'll give you all the spoilers and you can put on the hate comments on social media. That's fine. The Louvre, it's okay, it's fine. The Mona Lisa is an eight by 10 picture, so big deal. The Eiffel Tower, it's nice, I suppose, great. Versailles is beautiful, an amazing palace there.

But the best place to be that very few people actually go to is called the catacombs. And the catacombs are where in Paris a few centuries ago, they ran out of places to bury their dead. And so they dug up a million people and then they put in these catacombs, you walk down hundreds of yards and it will be all skulls and all femurs and all bones just through these catacombs.

And I thought to myself as I was walking through them about 20 years ago, I thought, oh Jesus, come back right now because this would be the coolest place to watch all these bones be like just flying up and meeting with these bodies. Like how cool would this be?

And then I thought, well, but yeah, but I would be actually also going so I wouldn't get to see it. And so then, but anyways, so yeah, so the dead will be raised.

Question number two on that question is, can our loved ones see us in heaven? And I wanna share with you probably my favorite scripture passage because I think it's overlooked but I think it gives us the mind of God. And I think this is for me a very important spot because I think we oftentimes, when it comes to what we're asking about God, we wanna put him into our box of our understanding.

But you and I know that that's not the God we have. This is why Jesus was so controversial and counter-cultural because they had this belief that the Messiah would just physically kick out the Romans and it would set up this eternal kingdom that would be on earth in the land of David in its full restoration.

But God was like, no, no, no, my kingdom's not even of this world. Like this is well beyond. I'm gonna give you even greater. I'm gonna give you, before we set up the promised land, I'm gonna give you the garden again with the city again.

And I think when we ask the question, can our loved ones see us or we think about it, it's to bring us some kind of comfort. But honestly, if you're a parent, I think you understand this, especially if you're a parent of an older child, are there not things that our kids do that we don't have the ability to stop anymore?

We don't have the ability to even say something about it. Like they make decisions and we can't do much except maybe influence it silently or they'll do whatever they wanna do anyways. And I don't know about you, but for me, that's gut-wrenching. That's really hard. I don't like that.

Now imagine if our loved ones could see us or were around us here on earth and they couldn't even influence, they couldn't even talk or they couldn't even comfort. Like we're in a deep pain and a deep hurt and a deep heartache and they can't even hug us. That doesn't sound like heaven. That feels like hell. Actually, that would be hell.

We see that in the rich man and the Lazarus and the parable that happens there, right? The rich man is saying, hey, if it's so great and Lazarus is taught so great, can you please tell and warn, send him to warn my loved one so they don't have to experience what I'm experiencing, right?

And we know that that great chasm just cannot be crossed. So what does God do? God does immeasurably more than you and I can even see or imagine.

My favorite Bible passage is from Ephesians 2, 5 and 6. And I love this. Lutherans oftentimes skip that part and just move into 8 and 9 and 10 because we like the grace alone from Luther.

But here's what it says in 5 and 6. Even when we were dead in our trespasses, he made us alive together with Christ. By grace, you've been saved. And then the best one, listen to this right now. And he raised us up with him and seated us with him into heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

Now in our human mind, what we wanna do is we wanna say our loved ones are right here with us. But can I just say, what if God blows our mind?

What if God does something that you and I we're seeing and experiencing right now, but because of our fallenness, because of our sinfulness, we actually don't see it, it's veiled. And what I believe that that scripture is actually telling us is that you and I are actually seated right now in the very throne room of Christ.

We're here on earth, but we're also in heaven. We're in the throne room of Christ. And our loved ones are actually gathered around us up there. We're with them, not they're with us.

We're seeing what they're experiencing because we see that and experience that when we do the heavenly happenings. So when you gather in worship, when we celebrate in baptism, when we commune around the table of the Lord, that is not a table here on earth, that is a table in the throne room of Christ.

And when we gather at weddings and at funerals, we are seated with our loved ones, celebrating and cheering and consoling and comforting by the power of the Holy Spirit.

And when we get to heaven, it won't be, I've never been here, but it will be, I've never left here. It won't be, I have missed you. It will be, we've always been together.

It will be this déjà vu that will happen eternally. And that's what I believe God does for us. He does more than we can imagine. He takes us right now in the very throne room of Christ.

Now, I get it. Like we're sitting here and we're going, it doesn't always feel that way. It doesn't. But God does way more than your mind can conceive. And when that veil will be lifted, we'll get it. We'll see it and we'll experience it because it's the very word of God for us in this.

All right, let's get to another great question. As an introverted person who prefers solitude, I feel guilty for sharing my faith and loving my neighbor. Social interactions can be draining. And I don't feel like that my life yields the same impact for God as someone who's outgoing and energetic.

How can I reframe my thinking to be more useful for God? Are there examples of introverts in the Bible who serve God? Absolutely, so let's share a few of these.

Moses was an introvert. He's a reluctant leader who just wanted to serve in the background. He was slow to speak and he was hesitant in crowds. He didn't see himself as a public communicator. He preferred solitude. He literally spent 40 years shepherding in the wilderness, right? So he preferred all those things.

And what did God do? God gathered around him others to help him, to be with him.

Jeremiah was deep in his faith and a private processor, right? He was sensitive and contemplative. He was emotionally aware. He also battled with some depression and possibly some anxiety, right?

Here's what I really want you to hear. God wired you the way you are. Don't ever fall for the lie that you have to be like a different disciple. You don't need to preach like Paul. You don't need to be the guy who wants a spotlight. You need to be who you are as God wired you.

Your giftedness in how your personality plays out is wonderful because God formed and fashioned you in the womb just the way you are.

I thank God for people like my wife, who's an introvert, who's an amazing prayer warrior. And matter of fact, her prayers of transformation or bringing of faith to people are greater than my invitations of people to come to church.

As she's praying for someone near and far to come and have the power of the Holy Spirit at work in their heart and their mind, and then someone else to come alongside whenever that time is right by the power of God for that person to come and hear the proclamation of the gospel.

They are a mighty team and a team that works together. Even though they may be apart, they may not even know each other.

So don't carry guilt or shame for the way that God wired you in your personality because that's not from God, that's from Satan. And so send that back to the pits of hell where it belongs.

You are wired by God for the purpose of God to be used by God in the way that he has crafted you.

And that's why we get to be the body of Christ as Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12, that every single one of us is vital as we are to make the whole body of Christ to proclaim the glory of Christ to the world.

Okay, all right, that's a great question. Question number three, dive in here.

All right, why do our church, why do worship services look different? Why do our church services look so different? That's a great question.

So first of all, let's just understand this here. Luther talked about this. Martin Luther talked about this when he was writing the Augsburg Confession. He said, there's certain things in churches that are necessary and then there's certain things that are not necessary.

And he said, so chanting and vestments, like what you wear, they're not necessary. He said, they're really just up to what is culturally fit for where you're at, right?

What is necessary in our worship? And this is cross-culture. There are certain things that we would say are necessary in worship cross-culturally, so around the world.

First, it's gotta be on the word of God. It's gotta be on the truth and the scriptures, nothing else. There is nothing as authoritative as the word of God. Nothing.

For us as Lutherans, we would hold firm to that, that the word alone is what we hold as all the authority. It's what we teach from. It's what we base our scriptures, our sermons on. It's what we base our lives on.

Nothing, not even Luther's confessions have the same power and authority as the word of God. It is the word alone. And this will form and fashion all of our worship.

Second, for us, we're sacramental. So we believe in the sacraments. We wanna see and celebrate the sacraments. And for us, that's communion and baptism.

It's where we receive the means of grace, everlasting and eternal life, where we have the very physical, tangible body of Christ present with us, in, with, and under the word and the wine and the bread and the wine, in the water.

It's where we see it's commanded by God, it's began by God, and it gives us a promise of salvation by God. And we celebrate and we do these things often, and they have a physical, tangible element.

And so those are the central parts of worship, the word and the sacrament. The rest is cultural. The rest is cultural.

What fits in the culture that we have? And it should be cultural.

Worship in the United States of America will be centered around word and sacrament, but will look differently than worship in Central America, South America, in Europe, in Asia, and in Africa.

Worship in Germanic, or in Germany will look different than it should in Africa. Because it will, the songs will be different, the vibe will be different, the energy will be different, the culture will be different. And it should.

It's a multitude of nations and of peoples who gather. And when it will be unified in one voice, one tongue will be at the return of Christ and a new heaven and a new earth.

And until then, we from multitudes of nations and of people and of tribes and in cities have differences in worship.

We praise and celebrate and encourage their worship around the one true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And we uplift them and we celebrate them and we thank God for them.

We thank God for every single church on earth that every single week proclaims the glory and the grace of Christ and makes heaven fuller, the kingdom stronger and lives greater.

And we worship in ways that engage each of us personally and collectively to be brothers and sisters in the faith.

All right, question number four, what about the end times? What do we believe as it relates to the end times of Jesus Christ? This could be its own series for six weeks. So I won't go that long, but I will share what we do believe.

As I do think this is important. As Lutherans, we say that we are called amillennialists.

So there's premillennialists, amillennialists, and postmillennialists. All right, we're amillennialists.

And what does amillennialists mean? And by the way, this is kind of why I like Lutheranism.

Lutheranism is really good at taking faith and reason and saying they work together. And then when it kind of contradicts or it doesn't make sense, we just kind of sit on the fence.

So this is why in our belief of the Lord's Supper that we believe that Christ is physically present in, with, and under this very bread and this very wine.

We also say it is actually just bread and wine, but it is also the very body of Christ.

Well, how can it be both? Like, what do you mean?

And we go, we don't know, but that's what God's word said. So we're gonna sit on the fence. It's uncomfortable, but it's biblical.

All right, and so it's kind of same thing with amillennialists.

Here's what we would say. When did the end times begin? At the ascension of Jesus Christ. Then the end times began, right?

As a matter of fact, the disciples needed help being told the end times began because like they just kept staring and going, okay, he said he's coming back. Like, let's just wait here. And finally, like a messenger from the Lord said, hey guys, he'll come back, but go, you got things to do, right?

So the end times began then.

So we believe we're currently in the end times and we've always been in the end times.

And the end times, like this is why we sit there and we say it's always been in the end times.

Like this is where we would say that Satan is bound. He doesn't have the ability to do anything carte blanche because of the victory over death and the devil.

And so he's bound by sin, but he is chained like a pit bull. But if you go into his yard, he's still here and he is still able to get you if you're in his yard.

Which is why I wanna say, let me just say this to all campuses, this is my little side note. I say this, parents, please, especially, this is my plea for you, for your kids.

Don't let anyone fool you that a Ouija board is no big deal.

It makes me sick that you can buy one of those at your local Walmart and your local stores.

Those are Satan's tools. If you communicate with the devil, he will communicate with you and he bites and he bites hard.

So don't play with satanic arts because we still live in this time where it's a now and a not yet. Christ is victorious, but not yet completely like the devil and Satan has not yet been vanquished.

That will come at his second coming.

And so as amillennialists, we believe we're in the end times now and we've been in them forever.

For those of you that remember or recall World War II, that was atrocious. It was horrific.

Wars and rumors of wars and mass murder and it was hell on earth, literally, especially overseas.

Fast, take yourselves back even further, medieval times, we weren't around.

But I mean, the Crusades and the Moors and the Christians fighting against each other and just the lifestyle and the pillaging there by people and the lack of safety, hell on earth.

Humanity in its time where we're at now because of its fallenness has always been hell on earth.

And so we live in the end times right now and Christ will come again.

That's amillennialism and that's what we believe. We're in the end times and they're ongoing.

It's not a literal thousand years, it's just a completely long time.

So don't get lulled to sleep thinking that Christ isn't coming.

He is and he's coming really soon. And we hasten and pray that that day would come quickly and come soon.

Come Lord Jesus, come quickly.

And so when we pray for that, we pray that he'll bring an end and he'll come.

And that's what we believe about that.

Okay, all right, here we go.

Okay.

I think this is a really important question. And I'm gonna answer this because it's also a very impersonal question for me as well.

I have a friend who has PTSD and who committed suicide. Are they in heaven? And what does the scripture say about suicide?

And this is a personal question to me because some very dear friends of ours, as I've shared before, they lost their son to suicide as well, very recently.

And it's a horrific, horrific time in anyone's life. And it's painful and it's hard.

And the scriptures are very clear about the unforgivable sin.

And that is blaspheming against the Holy Spirit, which means rejection of the Holy Spirit, of saying, I do not believe in God, there is not a God.

And dying without that faith.

And I want you to hear me very clearly.

That a person who has Jesus in their heart, it doesn't go away.

He doesn't go away.

He doesn't leave them because their brain has been miswired or has had something happen to it.

And they do something, they fall in a sin, and it is a sin.

They fall in a sin in a moment's notice and they can't take it back.

Salvation relies in the power and the work of Jesus.

And Jesus, his blood and his righteousness cover a multitude of sins, including the sin of suicide.

Because the old thinking used to be that if you died in a sin that you couldn't be saved.

But I'm gonna be honest with you. There's multiple ways that you can be saved.

One way is to die and die within a sin.

I will tell you, if I'm driving down the road and my car drifts into oncoming traffic or a car drifts into my lane, and my last moment is with a semi-truck barreling down at me, my last thought's not gonna be like, oh, glory to you, Jesus. Like that's, it's not, it's probably not gonna be a good thought.

It's definitely not gonna be a holy thought.

Right?

Or if we're doing something and we just have an aneurysm and whatever we're doing isn't glorifying to God, it doesn't mean we've lost our salvation.

Salvation is of the heart. And that's an important part.

And so here's what I wanna also share with you.

How do we minister to someone whose family member has committed suicide?

Minister with what you know.

If they know Jesus, give them the affirmation to say that Jesus is a God who saves.

He is not a God who condemns.

And give them peace and comfort and prayer and a certainty of the power and the grace of God, that his love does cover a multitude of sins.

And let me say this to you, to everyone, of course, if you know someone who is in trouble and who is having thoughts, please don't sit silently, get them help, call on their behalf, see the signs and make an intervention.

I promise it is worth it.

All right, let's move on.

Okay.

All right.

All right, this is a good question.

Do you believe Judas who betrayed Jesus went to heaven?

Great, that's a really good question.

Okay, first of all, here's what I would say.

Judas and his betrayal and Peter and his betrayal were not different.

All right, Judas betrayed Christ and turned him over.

Now, I'm not saying that Judas is a bad guy.

When we look through the scriptures, what do we see about Judas?

Judas was a disciple, right?

He was one of the first 12, but we also know that the entire time he was the treasurer.

So as people would give to the ministry of Jesus, we also know in the scriptures that Judas was skimming off the top.

So he was always stealing from the treasury as well.

Now, whether that time with Jesus transformed him to allow him to see Jesus as Lord and Savior, I don't know, we can't read his heart.

So I can't read the heart of Judas.

What I can say is, and again, this is where we say, there are times where we go, I don't know, but here's what I do know, okay?

And what I do know about Judas is this.

We do know that he felt guilt and shame for his betrayal of Christ.

And we know that that guilt and shame was so much so that he actually, that which he profited, he tried to give back and they wouldn't take it, right?

We also know he didn't understand or get the grace of God and the forgiveness of Christ.

And so he felt like there was no way out.

Now, Peter denied Christ three times.

I don't know the man, you're wrong, I'm not one of his fathers, leave from me.

And he ran out naked, filled, and that would tell you in a first century Galilean understanding, when he ran out without his clothes on, that is the epitome of shame.

He fully shamed himself.

Him and Judas had the same following.

Now, what was the difference?

Well, Peter waited and trusted him when he saw the Lord for the first time, the Lord said, do you love me? Yes, do you love me? Lord, yes, do you love me? Lord, why are you asking me over and over? Yes, I love you, then go and feed my sheep.

You've been redeemed and restored.

You've been redeemed and restored.

And so he trusted in the hope and the promise of Jesus.

So that's where we lie, right?

And that's where we stand is on that word of God, right?

And that's who we are.

And those are the questions that we get to answer.

Now, there's like, we could be here for eight hours and we could have some pizza delivered if it wasn't so much snowing at all of our campuses, but we can't.

I will end with this question.

I think this is a great question.

Cause I think it's just one easy to answer, but I also think there's a spot that can give us just something to think about.

Question is, was Jesus black?

And that's a really good question.

We see a lot of pictures of Jesus.

And remember, they're oftentimes pictures of our European Jesus with blonde hair and blue eyes.

I hadn't thought about this until recently because a good friend of mine, who's also a Lutheran pastor, but he's also a rabbi, he said this when asked about this question.

And he says, he tells this to his eighth grade students.

He asked him the question, he says, what continent was Jesus alive on?

And I sat there and thought for a minute and you know what continent it is?

Asia.

Jesus was Asian, Middle Eastern Asian, not blonde haired, blue eyed, right?

But he looked like the people of Middle East Asia.

And that's what he looked like.

And here's who he came from, all nations and all peoples.

No matter who you are, where you've been or what you've done, Jesus came for you.

And that's what I love about these questions that we get to ask.

We ask questions to Jesus because we can ask him anything because he is a friend of ours.

The scriptures say that you are enemies of God when we're apart from God, but through your baptism and your life with Christ, he no longer considers you an enemy, he calls you his friend.

And you know what I do with my friends?

I ask them questions.

I talk about things I don't understand and ponder and we debate and we wonder together.

I wanna invite you as you think about asking for a friend and as you think about asking your friend Jesus to try practice with me.

The next time you're in your car by yourself, talk to Jesus as if he's your best friend sitting in the passenger seat next to you.

Just have a conversation with him.

Ask him about his day.

Tell him about your day.

Ask him the questions that you've always wondered and listen for his voice because he's your friend.

Today, tomorrow, and forever, he's your friend who's given you the gift of God and seated you in the throne room of Christ.

And so you know he loves you.

You know he loves those around you.

And you know that your hope and your future is secured because of his love for you and through the empty tomb.

Will you pray with me?

Father God, thank you so much for the gift of your son, Jesus Christ.

Thank you that we are friends, that we can ask anything and you will answer.

We love you and we're loved by you.

Today, tomorrow, and forevermore.

And so Lord, let us be confident not only in who we are as your children, but in who you are as our Lord, our Savior, and our friend.

And all of God's people said, amen.