

The Right Question

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"Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. So Jesus asked the twelve, "Do you also wish to go away? Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life." - John 6: 66-68

In 1980 a local fellow, early twenties, quite knowledgeable about horses, was hired to take care of the livestock used in making a movie outside Santa Fe. When filming was complete, there was a party. And after that he still had duties at the stable. Finally, at 5:00am, work done, he got in his truck to head to his parents' home in the South Valley.

He never made it. Evidently he fell asleep at the wheel and ran off the road. I didn't know the young man, but I was pastor of his parents' congregation. They asked me to do the funeral. I don't remember much about the service other than it was held at Strong-Thorne's Chapel. But I will never forget what happened at the cemetery.

After final words were said at the graveside, and as people said their goodbyes to the young man and to one another, a young lady carrying a baby walked up to the parents and said, "You don't know me. And you have no reason to believe what I'm going to tell you. But this is your granddaughter."

I was the only person standing nearby, and all I could think of was that I'd wandered onto the set of the NBC Monday Night Movie. Not only was this young lady's timing off – right after the graveside service? – but the parents were tough customers. They'd owned a pawn shop. They'd heard every lie and sad story in the book. They knew how to tell con artists where to get off, and they often did so. I could tell by the way they looked at each other that they had their doubts. Still, after peering inside the baby blanket, the wife said, "Would you come ride with us? There's a reception at our house."

Back when I used to be a preacher, any sermon having to do with doubt was a big seller. And we have doubts. For most of us doubt is not an insurmountable problem. We don't go around doubting God all the time. Most days we believe God is there and God cares. But some days we have our doubts, and what are we to do with them?

One thing we should not do is act as though our doubts don't exist. That's being dishonest. Philip Yancey, author of *Reaching For The Invisible God*, grew up in a congregation that had no room for doubts about God. The church's corporate sponsor was evidently Nike, and its creed was, "Believe... Just do it!" Yancey left this congregation for another that helped him learn to take his doubts in stride.

In the scripture at the top of the page, Simon Peter gives us a question that helps take doubts in stride. "To whom can we go?" What would we be missing out on by walking away? Who else give us such hope? Who else gives us a better song to teach our kids than "Jesus Loves Me"? Sometimes there's an exactly right question to ask. "Okay, what's life going to be like if I don't believe?"

The next time I saw the granddaughter, she was 12 years old and serving cake at her grandparents' 50th wedding anniversary celebration. Of course, I had heard about her every time I visited the grandparents. I just hadn't seen her. Their world revolved around her.

Then the grandmother died, and the grandfather attended the funeral in a wheelchair. The granddaughter was 19, and she moved a folding chair into the aisle next to him because she couldn't get her arm around him from the pew. And there they sat, the grandfather being comforted by the granddaughter.

A few years later he died. The granddaughter took the lead in making arrangements, and once again, she and I found ourselves in the same place. Her father's service, grandmother's service, and grandfather's service were all held in the same room in the funeral chapel and over a period of a quarter of a century. I thought that was rather amazing. But what made it all possible was her grandparents' response when she was but a baby in her mom's arms that day in the cemetery. They didn't walk away. They asked, "Would you come ride with us? There's a reception at our house."