

Hard Questions: Why Am I Here?

June 5

Romans 8:18-28 (CEB)

18 I believe that the present suffering is nothing compared to the coming glory that is going to be revealed to us. 19 The whole creation waits breathless with anticipation for the revelation of God's sons and daughters. 20 Creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice—it was the choice of the one who subjected it—but in the hope 21 that the creation itself will be set free from slavery to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of God's children. 22 We know that the whole creation is groaning together and suffering labor pains up until now. 23 And it's not only the creation. We ourselves who have the Spirit as the first crop of the harvest also groan inside as we wait to be adopted and for our bodies to be set free. 24 We were saved in hope. If we see what we hope for, that isn't hope. Who hopes for what they already see? 25 But if we hope for what we don't see, we wait for it with patience.

26 In the same way, the Spirit comes to help our weakness. We don't know what we should pray, but the Spirit himself pleads our case with unexpressed groans. 27 The one who searches hearts knows how the Spirit thinks, because he pleads for the saints, consistent with God's will. 28 We know that God works all things together for good for the ones who love God, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Why Am I Here? (title slide)

Because I'm preaching this morning.

I think we all have those "why am I here" moments like, why am I in the kitchen?, oh yeah, I was getting the scissors.

But I don't think that's the kind of hard question that keeps us up at night. It may wake us up, when we finally remember the thing we forgot, but it's not the Hard Question "Why Am I Here?"

The hard question, "Why Am I Here?" is an attempt to define your life. And it often brings up other questions, like:

- Is here really where I'm supposed to be?
- Am I doing the right thing?
- Am I making the right choice?
- Is this really what God is calling me into?

I've asked myself that a lot since I said yes
to the Bishop
and to Oak Grove United Methodist,
and to moving to another state
and uprooting my family's life.

I know I'm not the only one facing big choices right now. Graduates, you're also facing big changes and big choices.

And isn't it amazing how everybody is sooo invested in your choices! People are giving you so much advice that maybe you're starting to feel like they think you're some kind of stupid, like you can't even.

I choose to believe that people mean well even when their advice is maybe a little annoying. I think advice is about 60% love and 40% fear. It's mostly love because our family and friends really do want the best for us. But I think there's also a lot of fear. Fear that we have to make the right choices, or else... We have to do the right thing, or else... We feel like we just can't afford to make any mistakes.

Because we feel like if we get it wrong, we'll ruin our entire future. **(slide2)**

The problem with this thinking is that it paints a picture of a God who doesn't care about us.

if we think that our own choices bear so much weight that our actions and choices, alone, determine the future we are behaving as if

God doesn't act,

God doesn't forgive,

God doesn't interact,

And God can't or won't find another way to do something if we don't cooperate the first time.

This way of thinking creates a graceless, powerless understanding of God. A God who maybe set creation in motion, but then said you're on your own so don't screw it up!

If we believe that our choices alone determine the future, then it feels like God doesn't care about us.

But that's not the God that Paul describes. Take a look at verses 26- 27.
(slide3)

Paul describes a God who "comes to help our weakness"

A Spirit of God who converts unexpressed groans into prayers for exactly what we need, when we don't even know what we need.

Who searches our hearts and pleads with us to just try it God's way and when we don't cooperate with God, pleads with us again and again, gently luring us towards God's will.

Recalculating the route of our lives, again and again like a gps trying to give me directions when I keep missing the turn. There's always another way to reroute and get there. **(Slide4 -- recalculating)**

In these times of big transitions and big choices it's so easy for our choices to feel like life or death when really our choices are just between one route, or another.

As Methodists we believe that God has given us free will --**(Slide5) our choices matter, so we should always try to live our faith, but God stays in relationship with us no matter what.** The outcome is not just the result of our choices, it's a mix of our choices and God's interaction -- **God is inviting us into co-creating the future.** Not abandoning us to our own devices.

God never stops working with us, around and through and beyond all the good and bad choices we make... God never stops working with us, to transform our lives and the world.

I can step out into the unknown -- being a pastor of a church for the first time, when I'm not even done with seminary, when I feel wildly unqualified because I'm not alone.

Everything doesn't depend on me
making the best choices,
or preaching the best sermons
or being the best administrator,
or being good at doing, only God knows, what else I'll need to do.

I will make mistakes.

I will say the wrong things.

I will do the wrong things.

There will be days when I will feel like I am the wrong person and wonder, what was the Bishop thinking when he called me?!

But God comes to help in our weaknesses.

The Spirit knows what we need and converts our groans and moans and whining into prayers.

And God works with us to make it work. Recalculating, and recalculating and recalculating no matter how lost we feel. **(slide 6-- recalculating)**

So, it's OK when we don't know why we're here, or what we're supposed to do, or aren't sure what we want, or how to get it.

Because we're not alone. God's in this with us. So we'll get there together.