

"But they did not understand what Jesus was saying and were afraid to ask."

One of my first jobs out of college was as a regional organizer for the southeastern U.S. for Bread for the World, a Christian organization dedicated to alleviating hunger here and abroad.

This job necessitated me flying out of the NY office a few times a year to spend about a month in the field.

There I'd meet with local parishes and regional church staff, give media interviews and lead weekend workshops.

It was quite a job.

I think they must've hired me for my youthful enthusiasm and passion as much as anything.

But the one thing our supervisor Kim Bobo impressed upon all of us organizers -- from the least experienced to the most seasoned -- was not to be afraid of questions.

We were trained to ask a lot of questions during the issue briefings before heading out to the field. And once we got out there, we were to encourage folks to ask questions and not be afraid if we didn't know the answer. Instead, we were supposed to admit it, saying, "I don't know."

Kim positively drilled into our heads NOT to try to fake or evade an answer, but to say clearly:

"I don't know. I'll find out and get back to you."

And then do it.

I wonder how today's gospel might've read if those first disciples had had the benefit of such training.

Here they are traveling with Jesus.
Jesus, so loving and open.
Jesus, who questioned conventional authority.
Who taught and led by example.
Who taught by asking questions.

Yet the disciples managed to end up doubly confused --

not understanding Jesus' message AND
too afraid to ask questions.

In fairness to the disciples, it *was* a tough message.
For the second time in Mark's gospel
Jesus is predicting his passion,
saying that he will be betrayed, killed and after three days
rise again.
It wasn't an easy message to digest,
even with repeating.

This is where the gospel tells us that "they didn't understand
what Jesus was saying and were afraid to ask."

And this is where things go off the rails.
Instead of focusing on Jesus,
instead of trying to dig a little deeper to at least try to understand
what he was saying,
the disciples pivot to themselves.
They conjure up what they *wanted* to hear,
turning against one another in the process.

So while they're arguing about which of them is the greater,
Jesus is all about *bringing everyone together*
in love and service --
particularly on behalf of the vulnerable, the underdog,
the least.

That's who children were in that society.
That's why they were welcomed by Jesus,
showing that in God's eyes no one of us is greater than the next
as we are ALL Children of God.

Now think about it.
The beauty of that truth is what the poor disciples missed
in their fear of asking questions.

Kinda' makes you wonder what we're missing, doesn't it?

And maybe that's just as it is.
We've already seen how Jesus doesn't tire of
repeating the hard truths.
He's not afraid of asking or answering the hard questions.

Indeed, God in Christ Jesus came among us
in order to know and *be known by us*.
The Incarnation -- the Word made flesh --

shows once and for all that
 Christ Jesus wants nothing more than to share our whole lives –
 questions and struggles and all – to bring us closer to God.

You recall the story of the disciple Thomas
 (as told in John's gospel).
 We often refer to him as "Doubting" Thomas --
 but Jesus never did.
 Jesus took his questions seriously.
 And Thomas?
 He ends up makes the strongest profession of faith
 in that gospel,
 recognizing Jesus as his "Lord and God!"

So today I propose that we give ourselves permission
 to fear not asking a question.
 Because Jesus has already long since done so.
 Let's each take a moment to consider a question we have
 about our faith.
 About God or Jesus or the Holy Spirit.
 About the Bible or the Creed or the Prayer Book.
 About prayer.

Then don't be afraid to write it down right here in church.
 (That's what the yellow slip of paper is for.)
 No need to sign it (unless you want to).
 Then please put it into the offering,
 in the assurance that God *wants* to receive
 our questions, doubts and challenges
 right along with all the tokens of our lives.
 For they too are precious to God.

[SILENCE... while folks fill out the following slip distributed with bulletins:

"But they did not understand what Jesus was saying and
were afraid to ask him.*" - Mark 9:32

* "**Be not afraid**" = one of the most repeated lines in the entire Bible.]

THANKS BE TO GOD: AMEN!

