

**All Saints' Church**  
**Cottenham with Rampton**



**Pastoral Letter #83**

**September 2023**

Dear Church Family,

I don't know about you, but I really enjoyed our sermon series over the summer exploring the questions that Jesus asked. Using John Pritchard's book *'Twenty Questions Jesus Asked And How They Speak To Us Today'* as a resource, we considered stories behind questions such as:

- 'What concern is that to me?' (John 2: 1-12)
- 'Why are you afraid?' (Mark 4: 35-41)
- 'Who touched my clothes?' (Mark 5: 21-40)
- 'What are you looking for?' (John 1: 35-42)
- 'Why did you doubt?' (John 1: 35-42)
- 'Who do you say that I am?' (Mark 8: 27-38)
- 'What do you want me to do for you?' (Mark 10: 46-52)

If you missed any, why not have a look at the passage and then imagine Jesus asking that question of you today. What would *you* say in reply?

One of my favourite stories involving a question is that of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. You can find it in Luke's gospel (24: 13-35).

And the question he asked them was, *'What are you discussing together as you walk along?'* *They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, 'Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?'*

*'What things?' he asked.*

Do read the story to remind yourself what happened next.

I have a journalist friend who asks the best questions of anyone I know. But I didn't understand why until I started to see how Jesus used questions.

So, why does the Son of God – who literally knows people's thoughts (Luke 5:22) – use questions?

After walking along with the Emmaus travellers for a while, Jesus simply asks them what they're discussing. He doesn't impose his agenda – he simply asks permission to join in the conversation they're already having.

The travellers respond – exasperatedly – wondering if he is the only one who doesn't know about everything that's happened over the past days. Of course, Jesus knows better than anyone. And he still asks if they would tell him a little more.

Jesus isn't on a fact-finding mission. He seems to be asking because he wants to hear how these travellers will narrate their own experience or tell their own story. He gives them the space to process their hurt, confusion, and longings in their own choice of words.

And this is what I experience when my journalist friend asks me a question.

Her questions open me up, but not because she's especially incisive or articulate, nor because she uses the right inflection – though she is and does. Instead, it's because when she asks me a question, I don't feel like I'm being interrogated. I feel as if someone is genuinely curious about how I might tell my own story. She is genuinely curious about me.

We can practise that kind of curiosity with our friends, work colleagues, relatives, and fellow church members. When they share how their weekends were, that they saw a great film last night, or how busy they are, we might ask what meant most to them, what they made of the characters, or what stops them from slowing down.

The author Andy Crouch puts it like this:

*'Brew coffee or tea, sit with a friend and ask them questions – questions just one step riskier than the last time you talked. As you listen, observe the flickers of sadness or hope that cross their face. Try to imagine what it must be like to live their story, suffer their losses, dream their dreams.'* (Strong and Weak: Embracing a Life of Love, Risk, and True Flourishing, p. 91)

This isn't about using questions to manipulate a conversation and get it somewhere we want it to go. This is a Jesus-inspired curiosity that transforms not just our conversations, but our relationships – one question at a time. And if you end up sharing a little of your own faith with them, all well and good! As a church that seeks to grow in faith and in number, it's wonderful when we get that opportunity to share with another what following Jesus looks like for us.

I do hope that you had a good summer. I'm just about to go off on my summer holiday and am hoping for a good time of rest. You will be in Revd Marie's capable hands whilst I'm away.

On my return it will be Harvest Festival (Sun 1<sup>st</sup> Oct) and we will be joined at the 10.30am service by Cottenham Baptist Church and the Salvation Army. The following week, Rampton's Harvest Service will be a Choral Evensong at 6pm (Sun 8<sup>th</sup> Oct). Do come and join us.

With God's blessing,

Lynda

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