

*Sermon Series: Questions You May Have Asked*

*#1 - Is God Real?*

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Have you ever had questions about faith? Over the course of the summer, we are going to ask questions. We are asking questions that people are asking. We are asking questions that you may have even asked.

Today, we are going to start with the question, Is God Real? I have learned that if you go online, you will discover all kinds of responses to this question. You will see people say things that, frankly, we can't repeat in church. You will see people say things that attempt to prove the existence of God. Some of those are even pretty creative, like this one from u-tube.

Show the Video (God Exists - Man with Banana  
<http://youtube.com/watch?v=9zxbhAXe5yk>)

I have watched that now, more times that I probably should admit. I find it pretty funny. What helps you believe that God is real? Is it a banana? Or does the banana prove to you how God is not real? Over the last twenty years of ministry, I have been amazed at the ways in which people have tried to argue whether God is real or not.

Ultimately, it comes down to each one of us, having to answer that question for ourselves. Do you believe God is real? Do I believe that God is real? What helps us to believe what we believe?

The ancient Hebrew people believed God was real. They saw God when they looked around them and discovered so many things they couldn't explain. To help fill in the gaps, they attributed incredible signs and wonders to God.

As their faith grew and developed, they started to have a more sophisticated view of God. They came to believe that God was all around them, that God wanted to have a special relationship with them. They even came to believe that God wanted to bless the entire world by having a relationship with the entire world.

In time, the prophets that not only agreed was God real, ***but that we, as God's followers, witnessed to God's presence by how we lived and acted and treated others.*** Jesus, in our scripture for today, picks up on this tradition. When he returns to his hometown and he goes to the synagogue to preach.

He chose for his scripture a passage that highlighted the future hope of God, that God would set everything right some day. Then he gave a new twist to it. He said in essence,, "God is real. God wants to make a difference in this world. God wants the poor to know that they are not forgotten, they are not abandoned. God wants to proclaim release to the captives and to give sight to the blind. God wants to set the burdened and battered free, and God wants this now, through me and through you."

The future reality is now. Jesus claims that God has an eye to those who are hurting and outcast, to those who are oppressed and put down. And Jesus is saying that God wants to do something about that through you and me.

***We live in a day and age, when people are having a hard time believing in God. Many will say, they don't see the church (the people of God), reaching out to make a difference in this world. They are basing their claim of God's existence (or non-existence) by how we act.***

Personally, I see people in the church all the time who are faithful and living out their faith. But I would say we need to keep working at living our faith, so others can see God in us.

It can happen in big ways, like being involved in building a habitat for humanity house (Why can't our church sponsor a Habitat Home?), or going on a mission trip, or even feeding hungry people at a meal program. It can also happen in little ways, by simply caring for one another. By willing to be involved in another's life, because God has placed that person there for us.

I remember the day God became real for me. It happened through a lady named Mildred Nelson. She was my 3<sup>rd</sup> grade Sunday School teacher at First United Methodist Church in Bismarck, ND. Mildred taught the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade class for 40 years in that church.

Mildred is a wonderful, dynamic lady who stood about 5 feet tall. To be honest, I don't remember one thing Mildred taught me in Sunday School. What I do remember is that Mildred loved me. She loved the other students as well. She loved me and she showed me that she loved me and the others in all kinds of ways. She would take time to talk with us and listen to us, as if what we had to say really mattered.

Then, when we were done with her class, she just didn't forget about us. She stayed connected to us. Because she had an investment in us.

I remember when I was in high school. I hit a period in my life where I was struggling. I had gotten into some trouble in school, and with my parents. I was experimenting with some things that I really should not have been experimenting with. I know that my actions had caused my mom and dad to worry about me. I had stopped going to church. I had begun doubting whether God was really out there or not.

One day, I happened to stop by church to pick up my mom from her UMW circle. That was when I met Mildred. All five feet tall of her.

She got right up to me. She stuck her finger in my face and said, "What is this I am hearing about you, young man? I am not thrilled with what I am hearing. Don't you know how much I care about you? Have you forgotten how much God loves you?"

She said some other things to me as well. But her words got me thinking. So much so that when I went home, I went down to my room. My mom had found my Bible that I had thrown into the bottom of my closet and placed it on my pillow.

When I saw it there, I was still thinking about Mildred's words and I picked up the Bible. I looked up into heaven and I said, "God, I don't think you are out there, but if you

are, this is it. This is your last chance in my life. If you are out there, I want you to reveal yourself to me. I am going to open this Bible and I want you to show yourself. And I am not going to stretch to figure it out either. I want it straight and plain."

And I opened up my Bible, and I pointed to Isaiah 40:28 - 31 (Read these verses).

When I finished, that was when I knew, God is real. God is there. God cares about me. God cares about you.

All of this was set up by a mom and dad who cared enough about me to pray for me. And by a courageous woman by the name of Mildred who loved me enough to ask me the tough questions, and yet remind me that God loved me.

What about you? What is helping you to believe that God is real? Better yet, what are you doing to show the world that you believe God is real? How are you putting your faith into action?

May God help us live lives of faith.

Amen.