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## From the Clergy Associate for Family Ministries

### April Message

On my desk in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade classroom sits a box labeled “Ask the Clergy”— in it are questions submitted by our own Church School students. God bless all of you parents with these sharp and inquisitive children.

Dear Church School Students,

Thank you for these great questions. Books have been written on each topic by acute theological minds. Here are my quick thoughts, and do be in touch with me if you would like to speak more about all of this. I think one of the most important lessons I have learned is the importance of living gracefully and patiently with uncertainty; that even when we don’t have all the answers, and especially as we are searching for those answers, we have an obligation to act in a way that glorifies the maker of all things. That is part of how I understand the life of faith.

**“Do you think the vineyard owner from Matthew 20 was fair?”** Yes. It was the vineyard owner’s prerogative to be generous to the ones that showed up last. They all received the fair wage for their work. It is certainly not for us to be envious of God’s generosity.

**“Can you do something that God did not plan for you?”** God gives us free will. We are expected to make choices with the goal that the choices we make will please God and accord with God’s will. We can and do make choices that do not accord with God’s desire for us. When we do this willingly, we choose sin. It is for us to confess our sins, repent, and turn back to God.

Our interconnected relationship with God is more complex than that. Our actions have more to do with listening to God and looking for God’s presence in our lives. The more in tune we are with God, the more likely we are to realize our full potential as vessels of God’s love. Our future is hidden from our sight, and God is all knowing, but our choices are not made for us.

**“How high is heaven?”** When I was in second grade I memorized a poem by Emily Dickinson which has stuck with me:

I never saw a moor,  
I never saw the sea,

Yet know I how the heather looks,  
And what a wave must be.  
I never spoke with God,  
Nor visited in heaven,  
Yet certain am I of the spot  
As if the chart were given.

Asking about height supposes location in a worldly framework as does Dickinson's certainty of a spot—a point—in time. And yet heaven is outside of our concept of time and space... It could be as high as the stars, and as low as right here on earth. When we say the Lord's Prayer, we pray to Our Father in heaven, asking that God's will be done here on earth as in heaven. Jesus himself taught us to pray this prayer. And throughout his teachings I hear a repeated call to serve as God's emissaries here, bringing a vision of heaven to all we meet such that those we encounter might know God through us and our presence with them.

**“Why did God create diseases?”** God created the world, all its creatures and complex systems of life. God gave us free will and gave us what we know to care for it on his behalf. The presence of evil in the world is as real as the presence of good. As part of this world we encounter disease and suffering, as well as good health and in great joy. Throughout, we are expected to do our best to support one another in keeping God at the center of our lives. We are answerable for the choices we make in good times and in bad. How we respond to God's presence in the midst of turmoil is every bit as important as how we respond from a place of sublime comfort.

**“Does God know what you are thinking?”** Yes. That's why it's important always to be honest and to ask forgiveness when you make mistakes—because we all do. And God knows it better than any of us.

This letter represents the beginning of a conversation. I'm really glad you have asked your questions. Thank you all for the good work you are doing to be thinking about these things. I hope my responses help you. It continues to bring me great joy to share this journey with you, and I look forward to speaking more with you.

Faithfully,  
Cathy Quinn  
*Clergy Associate for Family Ministries*