

## Embracing Mystery

On Sunday, we continued our sermon series based on Brené Brown's book called *The Gifts of Imperfection*. This week we focused on cultivating intuition and faith . . . by letting go of the constant need for certainty.

1. Warm-up Question: Within each of us there's a deeply felt need to figure things out, to be in the know – to be able to explain life in nice, neat logical terms. What's something serious (or silly) that you really wish you knew the answer to?
  
2. In her book, Brené identifies 10 characteristics (i.e., Guideposts) of people who seem to thrive in life. One of those characteristics (Guidepost No. 5) is a high tolerance and appreciation for uncertainty in life. Brené noticed that people who thrive almost always are comfortable placing significant reliance on intuition and faith as valid ways of knowing. First let's tackle intuition.
  - a. To illustrate intuition, as Brené defines it, Pastor David gave the example of Fang and Buddy. Fang is the side of us that's careful, educated, logical, articulate, and analytical. Fang can give good, logical reasons for everything. Buddy is the opposite. Buddy is bold, whimsical, insightful, and comfortable going with the gut. Which side of you is more dominant in your personality? For whichever side is weaker in you, what is it about that side that you find most uncomfortable?
  
  - b. Brené says that intuition is not independent of facts or reason. In fact, psychologists believe that intuition is a rapid-fire, unconscious associating process where the brain subconsciously sifts through our knowledge, experience, beliefs, and values and delivers us a bottom-line conclusion that we call a "gut feeling." When in your life have you experienced intuition in a powerful way?
  
  - c. Job 38:36 says, "[God] has put wisdom in your inward parts and understanding in your mind." The Hebrew phrase for "wisdom in your inward parts" comes very close to our phrase "gut feeling." The ancient Hebrews pictured deep wisdom as coming from our gut and saw that as a gift of God. Why do you think God decided to give us that ability? What can intuition do for us that logic and analytical thinking can't?
  
  - d. In John 3:8, Jesus said, "The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." What's the connection between Spirit guidance and intuition? Are they the same thing or different?
  
  - e. Brené emphasizes that our intuition doesn't always tell us to hurry up and make a decision. Sometimes it tells us to slow down because we need to gather more information before making a decision. The story Pastor David shared about Dawn Watkin's Clearness Committee is an example of that. Have you ever rushed into a decision too fast when your gut told you to hold up? What happened?

- f. Think about a decision that is currently pending in your life. Tell us what the issue is and what your Spirit-led intuition tells you that you should do.
  - g. What are some practical ways to get in better touch with our Spirit-led intuition?
3. Now let's turn our attention to faith. People who thrive cultivate both intuition and faith. Brené Brown quotes Anne Lamott who says, "The opposite of faith is not doubt, but certainty. Certainty is missing the point entirely."
- a. What do you think Anne means? Do you agree?
  - b. Pastor Vivian said, "To believe in God demands an act of faith – as does the decision not to believe in God. Neither is based upon absolute certainty, nor can they be. To accept Jesus demands a leap of faith, but so does the decision to reject him." What do you think she means? Do you agree?
  - c. Pastor Vivian invited us to consider how a healthy tolerance and appreciation for uncertainty should affect our approach to matters of doctrine – all those things that Christians argue and differ about. For example, some Christians believe God created the cosmos in six 24 hour days, while others believe the days described in Genesis represent six epochs during which God guided the process of evolution. Do you think good Christians can differ about something like this? Is it ok for us to be passionate about the position we take? What does it look like to engage in a respectful discussion of differences about doctrinal matters?
  - d. Vivian made three key statements about certitude. Let's explore each. She said:
    - ✓ "Certainty can be dangerous." How so?
    - ✓ "Certainty can be self-serving." How so?
    - ✓ "Certainty can be psychologically painful." How so?
    - ✓ So what does it look like for us to be confident in our faith, while also being humble about how much we do not or cannot know?
4. Our Scripture for Sunday was drawn from the book of Job. Job lost his family and his health in a terrible calamity. Thereafter, he spent months trying to figure out why and how a good God could let that happen, but found no answers. Then God finally spoke. Read the passage from Job found on p. 3.
- a. How would you summarize God's answer to Job's questions about why he had suffered so much?
  - b. When in your life has your faith in God been deeply challenged? Why do you still believe in God? Are you comfortable believing in God even when you don't understand something in life? Why?

## Excerpts from Job 38 and 42

Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind, saying:

Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?  
Gird up your loins. I will question you, and you shall declare  
to me.

Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me,  
if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements—  
surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its  
bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone when the morning stars sang  
together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?

Where is the way to the dwelling of light, and where is the place of  
darkness, that you may take it to its territory and that you may  
discern the paths to its home? Surely you know, for you were born  
then, and the number of your days is great!

Can you lift up your voice to the clouds, so that a flood of waters may  
cover you? Can you send forth lightnings, so that they may go and  
say to you, "Here we are"? Who has put wisdom in the inward parts,  
or given understanding to the mind?"

Then Job answered the LORD: "I know that you can do all things, and that no  
purpose of yours can be thwarted. Therefore I have uttered what I did not  
understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. I repent in  
dust and ashes."