Ok, I’m going to start with a brief commercial for my Lenten series this year. And the subject that I’m addressing this Lenten seasons is what is called theodicy. And that’s a big word that just means this. it’s the question everyone asks at some point in their life I suppose. If God is so powerful and can heal, then why doesn’t he? Why is there so much suffering? If God can do something about it, then why doesn’t it happen? This is number one reason why people say that they don’t believe in God. If God is so great or good or loving, why is there so much suffering? In my last call there was a man in the congregation who a few years before I had gotten there had a little daughter, a toddler. And one day backing out of the driveway he backed over her and killed her. Think about it if you dare. Why would God allow such a thing? I’d like to take on for Lent.

This issue of course has implications for our lessons today. I’d to read to you a paragraph that another Lutheran Pastor wrote on a forum that I look at once in a while. It’s about her response to our Gospel lesson healings today. Here is what she wrote: I am working on my sermon for Sunday, and I confess that I am wrestling with God over it. The reading is full of stories of healing, and as someone who has cancer that has metastasized, I have gained a deeper understanding how hurtful these stories can be to people with chronic or incurable diseases. I can't just focus on the role of Peter's MIL when she is healed, or the numbers of people getting healed at the door of the house without asking the question, "Jesus, why couldn't or wouldn't you cure me?" I have found some interesting language in the reading, especially how the word for Jesus lifting up the MIL is the word used for resurrection. I ultimately see it as the cures are temporary--everyone will likely get sick again, and we know they all died--but this lifting up is something else. A permanent promise of what will happen for us all, a healing rather than just a curing. I have long separated the two, because I think Jesus can and does heal us in ways that don't include a cure. I personally find hope in that. My concern is that I have read a whole lot of articles and commentaries about this reading and no one seems to have gone in this direction. Am I in heresy-land? Is there a source you would recommend to help me more fully understand this?

Interesting yes? What is the answer that she settled on? Heaven. One day we will all be healed. But, and this is critical for our lesson today, notice how this answer is not satisfactory to her. She’s sort of settles there…..but this text is still hurtful. It’s not a satisfactory answer. And I’m sure she would discover if she hasn’t already, that in a situation of great suffering, to give this answer wouldn’t work. Why did this happen? Well, one day we’ll all be in heaven and then it will be OK. Nope. It doesn’t work. It doesn’t really address the question does it……why? And during our Lenten series I will walk through several answers that are typically giving to the question of why God allows such unspeakable suffering in the world. And I hope we will discover that none of them work very well.

You know we are a people who are hungry for answers aren’t we? I remember as a kid taking tests. And sometimes I didn’t know the answer and it was really hard not to look around at somebody elses paper to see if I could find the answer. It’s why when you have the answer, you’ll sometimes make sure that you position yourself so that nobody else can see it. We’re that hungry for answers. And our culture is just amazing at trying to provide them. Man, if you have a question just type it into Google. Or ask Alexa. And there are millions of people making millions of dollars promising to give you the answer to whatever problem you have. To weight loss, or how to make friends and influence people. Or keep you from getting dementia, or how to get girls, or rock hard abs. How to play an instrument or shoot a basket. If something is wrong with your car and you take to the mechanic, or if you go to the doctor you want what? You want the answer. And for many people that’s what it means to be educated. You know the answers. Some people want to turn me into the answer man. Like I have the answers. I went to school I’m supposed to know. Know what? The answers. That’s what we understand to be knowledge. Having the answers.

But I think this desire we have for answers, is a desire for that which does not ultimately satisfy. Maybe in the short term if I want to know how to use my computer, there are answers that will be really helpful. Someone figured out how to correct my legal blindness with corrective lenses. But ultimately answers will not provide what we are looking for. Theodicy is a great example. There is just no satisfactory answer. But that’s just the beginning. 600 years ago if someone had asked the question “what is the shape of the world”, the answer would have been “its flat”. OK, thank you. Thank you for giving me the answer. Off I go, satisfied. Only one problem. The answer was wrong. How much that was understood as knowledge in the past, is now understood to be wrong? Thinking you have the answer can actually prevent you from knowing, right?. One more time. Your answer can prevent from knowing. And then you have the deeper problem of once you think you have the answer you become resistant to new answers. Answers give you power and they give you control, and we don’t want to give that up. And so if someone comes along with a new answer or a different answer, what happens? They just just get rejected. That’s not what I learned. That’s not how I was taught.

And I think if you look honestly at your life, you will realize that you’ve had answers that worked for a while. But after a while you realized that answer wasn’t going to work anymore. I’ll bet that’s true for the way you farm, the way you do business, the way you parent, the way you teach. Hopefully this is true about your relationship to God. That would be a great conversation. Answers that used to seem right, but now no longer are. You need new answers. But you know that eventually those answer will wear out too. If you’re old like me you’ve been through this a few times. This is why you cannot teach the faith as a set of answers. Because after a while it doesn’t work. It actually blocks you from learning when you think you already learned it. I have sat down with people and I can’t talk about the faith at all because “yeah, I already took that class”. Yeah, I’ve learned all that. It just blocks everything. I learned about how to clear the cache on my phone a while back. That was a really helpful answer. But now it’s routine, doesn’t mean much. And that’s what happens to faith everytime when it’s learned as a set of answers. We are hungry for the answers, because they give us power and control. But it’s not really what we’re looking for at all I think. And when you stand before God, do you think that’s what God will do? See if you know the right answers? Answers are often helpful, but way, way overrated.

So let’s take a look at Gospel lesson today because Jesus is doing something today that I think moves beyond answers. The story begins with a woman with a fever. Evidently it was keeping her in bed. And Jesus lifts her up, or heals her. And what happens is that this sets off this huge domino effect. That gets passed around town as fast as Facebook somehow, we know how that works, and by the evening every sick person in the vicinity is at Jesus door. Not hard to understand. Because this guy is what. He is the answer. The answer to sickness and disease, and demons. Jesus is the answer. Maybe you’ve heard that before.

But then it starts to get more interesting, or unexpected depending on how you look at it. The text says next that he healed many of them. Not all of them. Many. Ok. See what’s happening to Jesus as the answer there? Not quite the answer that brought out the crowds is he. That would work quite as well on the flyer would it? Jesus is the answer! Come to where Jesus is tonight and he’ll heal many of you. Not quite what we want is it? Just a few sentences earlier Jesus is the answer. Now it’s well…..for many. And then it gets even more interesting because when he casts out the demons, he won’t let them speak, because they knew him. We went through that a couple of weeks ago. The demons always know Jesus right? They have the right answer. No one wonder Jesus blocks them. Because having the right answer isn’t what it’s about. Oh we know you Jesus. I learned it all in class. See what’s going on here? That’s not what his kingdom is about, knowing the right answer. Not at all.

So now lets set the stage. Jesus has the whole town in the palm of his hand right? And if that’s the case, If you have what everybody wants, if everyone likes you, wouldn’t you hang around? Set up shop. Stay? Hey this is pretty good for me. I have a real ministry here. This is workin’. All these people hungry to be healed and filled with demons who need to be cast out. Who wouldn’t stay, if you were the answer?

But the third paragraph of our Gospel lesson today shifts our attention to something different that Jesus was about. In the morning, he gets up and heads out to a deserted place to pray. And now this new reality begins to happen. Simon and his companions begin to do what? They begin to hunt for him, the text saus. They begin to seek him. Look for him. Where did Jesus go? Before, they had the answer. Now they are doing what? Seeking. They’re interested. Curious. Searching? Now they don’t know, but they’re searching And when they find Jesus what do they say? “Everyone is searching for you?”. That’s a little bit different than having the answer isn’t it? Everyone now doesn’t know, but is Seeking. Curious, to learn something new. And when Jesus hears that everyone is searching for him what does he do? Go back and say, “I’m back, here I am”. Nope. His work is done there, so it’s time to leave. See, the kingdom is more about seeking, and searching, and curiosity, and a willingness to learn than it is about knowing the right answers. Seek and you will find Jesus said. Knock and the door will be opened. See when you already know the answer you don’t have to do that anymore. Jesus ministry is successful when people are seeking him, searching for him, curious about him.

See if you were teaching a class what would you prefer? A group of students who were curious and interested, and wanted to learn something new, or a group who already knew all the answers. And if you taught them well, wouldn’t it leave them curious to learn more. What if being educated in the faith was learning to be curious about it, rather than a set of answers. What could be a more interesting subject than God, and to enter into a journey of curiosity? Think about it. Are you happier when you have all the answers. Or is it not true that you’re the most joyful and filled with life when you’re curious and wonder about things and are giving permission to experiment. God’s not going to sit around and give you all the answers. The bible is not either. You’re prayer life won’t either. I gurantee you that. But when you meet God the one thing I think you can count on is that your answers will come up way short. And that’s hard I agree. But when you get curious aren’t you very close to being free? What’s going on? I’m seeking to understand. Isn’t that what we need in the church more than a group of people who think they already have the asnwers. Of course, its’ not even close. And the thing about being curious about God is that is gets rid of a lot of the demons in your life. Because there is nothing like being curious, and creative and interested in learning. And that’s much different than having the right answer.

Hmm. I wonder. I’m curious. Where are you God? And by the way, why is there so much suffering? I’m searching. God it seems is much more interested in that. Amen.