

Essays on Ordination Questions
For Coastal Carolina Presbytery
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Do you trust in Jesus Christ your Savior, acknowledge him Lord of all and Head of the Church, and through him believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit?

Do I trust, am I willing to invest my life, pledge my troth, risk it all as if my very life depended on it, that Jesus is Lord of all? Am I willing to put it all down on the Jesus square on the roulette table of life and not bet on anything else, not keep a little in my pocket, not squirrel something away in some off-shore account, bank on anything, nor identify with any political ideology, flag, tribe or any other affiliation for my identity, life or meaning? Am I willing to bet the house on the truth that there is no other authority with the capacity to give real life and meaning?

Well, if I am honest, I can only give a qualified yes, a whisper, a strong maybe if my living is any testimony. Because, in truth, life is a journey, three steps forward – two back, out of the garden and back home again. The siren call of a million false, seductive voices begins the moment we are born, wanting to tell us who we are and whose we are and promising the illusion of feeling we are home if we will just “fit in”.

Thus, most of humanity lives homesick most of the time, fighting and clawing for a definition of home, operating on assumptions of scarcity and killing themselves and each other for dominance, sole possession of the keys to the house and false security. Such a mentality results in small, constricted lives, fear-full lives, defended lives versus (what Eugene Peterson calls in his translation of Matthew 11), living in “the unforced rhythms of grace”.

As those oft’ quoted words of Augustine say, (words probably uttered by every Presbyterian pastor in a sermon), *“Thou has made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee”*. So, to this question my restless heart gives a qualified, faltering ‘yes’. Now I fall and stand, fall and stand and fall and stand as I stumble on into the truth of what it means to trust Jesus to lead me to my true home in God. I believe. Help thou my unbelief.

Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be, by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ in the Church universal, and God's Word to you?

I do accept the written word in our scriptures as an authoritative and legitimate witness to the power and truth of who God is as revealed in the Word made flesh in Jesus the Christ. Elie Wiesel said, "God made *man* because God loves stories."

Our scriptures are the love story of God's relentless pursuit of human kind, seeking to lure us back into our true home in the heart of God. Our sense of exile from this home is not the result of God's absence but our limited sight and imagination. We are immersed in the reality of God but like the blind men who beg from Jesus to have their eyes opened we are in continual need of having our sight restored. Scripture is the corrective lens that can help us see again.

I never cease to be amazed at the genius and imagination and consistency across centuries of the narrative of our Creator God bent on being known and in relationship with all creation. Even through time bound images of violence and domination there is a timeless larger narrative of God holding it all in a suffering self-sacrificing love made visible in the most unlikely of places: Abraham and Sarah give birth to a nation, stuttering stumbling Moses leads a people out of slavery and into a new identity, Esther saves a people in Exile, a baby born in a feed trough incarnates the light and love of God, a murderous Pharisee becomes the first theologian of the Church. It is the story of a people learning to walk in the unforced rhythms of God's grace. It all culminates in Jesus, our true north, who leads us into the truth of who we are and whose we are and reveals on the cross the deadliness of a world that we create in our image, a godless world. Scripture is our rich inheritance, the pearl without price, the treasure without measure, into which I am still seeking to live and mine for the riches it holds.

While there is a need for solitary reading and reflection on the Word, this is a story meant to be read and shared by and between people. There is no one interpretation. The meaning of a text is not the purview of one individual, or congregation, or denomination or even religion. It is a story meant to be in conversation and seen as a conversation, humans with God and God with humans and humans with each other. Even with thousands of years of testimony we all continue to see in part as through a glass darkly and do not possess the whole truth of who God is. So, as we reflect upon and converse together on the intersections of Word to life and life to Word we gain an ever-enlarging vision of our incomprehensible and inapprehensible God.