**Sermon at Bluff 12 March 2017**

**“How can a grown man be born again?**” (John 3.4)

There are a lot of questions in John’s Gospel, eg 1.19ff, 1.37, 1.46, 1.50, 2.18, 20, before our text.

Some are *from* Jesus, others *to* Jesus. Most of them are not directly answered, and are not simple questions, expecting simple answers.

Nicodemus’ question seems to expect a response of ‘it is impossible’. He is puzzled, as he realises that Jesus means a spiritual dimension to life to which we must be awakened,findingשָׁלוֹם, born to this goal. It also disturbs him because he thought he had sorted out the real questions in life.

There is an underlying question: are Christians enquirers, or founts of knowledge?

Early Church was asking questions: who was Jesus, and what was his message?

Later, especially after Christianity became the state religion under Constantine, the job of the church was to provide answers, hence the creeds, and creation of heretics.

Bishop Ussher in 1654 worked out that creation took place on Oct 23 4004 BC, (James Lightfoot narrowed down to 9.oo am). Others work out precise dates for the end of the world.

Certainty leads to inflexibility and a hardening of the spiritual arteries.

Outside the church many assume Christians have got all the answers, have ‘arrived’, or think they have. There is some truth to this, but it damages true mission. Mission is one beggar telling another where to find bread.

Whose voice would you rather hear on your spiritual journey, the one who is shouting from the destination, or the one with whom you share the map?

TV portrayal of vicars – either as brash know-it-alls, or wracked with deep questions. It is enough to put you off from questioning, as it sounds like doubting. So what value do questions have?

We are reluctant to reveal our ignorance, yet many in the Bible did not know – Nicodemus, Abram – promises, Moses – burning bush, Elijah hiding, Job, Babylonian exile, Paul at conversion, etc.

Questions are not about lack of faith, but about searching for deeper faith.

**“our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee”** *(Augustine: Confessions Book 1).* A faith that cannot bear questions is no true faith. We ever seek, through questions, to move along the pilgrim journey, accompanied by other seekers, till we find that rest beyond the grave.