

“What Do You Think?”
Romans 14:1-12; John 8:31-32;
Psalm 139; Matthew 13:10-16

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He sat there, stunned. Stunned because he had just been beaten. Beaten by a computer in a game of chess. Remember when that happened, that famous computer called Big Blue was supposed to be able to play chess better than human beings. As we think about the idea of thinking and thoughts, we somehow these days look at computers as these devices that are able to do things we never thought we would be able to do, full of iterations that seems to be able to make things happen.

I wonder if we were thinking today about the nature of God and the thoughts of God, whether we would say that God has even more thoughts than a computer, rather than saying there are more thoughts than grains of sand. Either way we look at it, it's talking about the wonder of who God is, a wonder that takes us way beyond what we can do. Maybe a computer can beat us in chess, but I think God's got us hands down in almost everything.

It's interesting to think about God as one who thinks thoughts beyond our imagination. So the Psalm starts there and then it moves on. When it gets to us—well, there's no use counting our thoughts because we know that God's are so much greater. So what is the focus on with us? Instead of saying it's about how many thoughts we have, it says it's about the kind of thoughts we have. It asks God, “Look at me and see what kind of thoughts I have, where my heart is.” It's interesting that it brings the heart in. It actually talks about the heart first, and then the thoughts. I wonder how many times it is that our thoughts are someplace because of where our heart is.

What we think is influenced by how we feel. Have you ever been angry and had a hard time getting your mind off that thing? Your mind just keeps going over the same thing—that's where our heart is. It's interesting that Jesus says the same thing. Where our heart is... He's talking about it being a little dull and having to struggle a little bit. But where our heart is, is where our thinking goes.

As we begin to think today about the idea that we're reasonable people, that we have the ability to think, we first recognize that God's thoughts are way beyond our own. Then we begin to think about what shapes our thoughts and what's it all about? Today it seems we're supposed to be able to think things out in a way that now we're right about everything we've thought. So we will stand up for those thoughts we had. And yet, Paul is talking to a group of people who have done kind of the same thing. He says, “Don't quarrel over opinions.”

We know that our thoughts, our conclusions, are always partial because we're not God. We have to consider how we begin to function. Let me think about it this way: I imagine you have heard that old story about the blind men and the elephant. One of them is at the ear and says this animal is a flat, flappy kind of thing. Another is at the

trunk, and says it's like a snake. Another is by the side and says, "No, it's big and broad and I can't put my hands around it." Without a full set of vision, it's hard to put the whole thing together. I think that's what we struggle with.

In the history of thought, we've gone through a time we call the modern era, where the thought was that humans were rational beings that, through their reason, could figure it all out. We were going to have everything all taken care of because we would just reason it out. Then came along the post-moderns and they said, "No, really all you are doing is setting up a way that makes you be the one on power. Your way of thinking is just a way of having control over other people." Always just talking about narratives of power. So we end up with one group saying we can reason it out and another group saying it's all just about who wants to be in charge, it's all relative. We get lost in that morass between "can we reason it out?" or "is it all just relative?" Where do we turn?

Some folks think that it's about our starting points. The Psalmist thinks it's about our starting points. He thinks it's about recognizing God's thought is way beyond our own. God is the one that can shape the rest of what is.

When I went to L'Abri this summer, I remembered that its founder, Francis Schaffer, was one who said it's about our starting points. If you don't believe God is there, then you get lost in trying to reason it all out or thinking it's all relative, but if you think God is there, then you have a starting point. I wouldn't say that he never got stuck in quarreling about opinions, but when he looked at scripture and began to think from scripture, when he took that starting point, he helped us see that there's something we can think about that will help shape our lives.

Just one example of what I think he's talking about. At this point he's talking about the greatest commandment. We talked about that last week: love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and might, as it says in Deuteronomy. Jesus says heart, soul, mind, and strength. Because that is the greatest commandment, it's always been central to me. It always gives me an idea about what I'm supposed to do. But he helps me think about it in a new way. He says, "When I hear the first commandment to love the God who is there with everything that I am, it carries with it a total concept of life and truth." He goes on a little later, "But this commandment carries something more. It tells me something very fundamental about myself." A little later he says, "To think through the implication is totally exciting. The God who is there is of such a nature that he can be loved, and I am of such a nature that I can love."

I always thought of this as a call to a way to be, but he's also talking about who we are and who God is. God is a God that can be loved because God is asking us to love him. We are people who can love because that is what God is asking of us. He wouldn't ask us for something we can't do. Then it goes on to say "love your neighbor as yourself." It's telling us something about who we are and who we can be.

What a different starting point that is for me than this world around us that tells us that there's not enough to us and we need to acquire more stuff to make us OK. You're not

OK as you are because there's more you need to learn, more you need to be. But isn't being a child of God enough, and to know that we can love God and we can love one another?

In the anthem this morning, it said "Who can say how great the jubilation when human hearts with only love are filled." It certainly changes the way I think about going into the day if I think about the idea that I can love. It's not something I can't do. It's not something that I'm not good enough to do. In many ways it feels that what God is doing when he comes in Jesus Christ is to say, "You're forgiven. Let go of that stuff so that you're free to love."

It's not about what you have. It's not about where you live. It's that you're a child of God and that you can love God in return. You can love yourself and one another. What a different starting place that is than a world that tells us we're not so good, we're not very valuable, we're not worth caring about sometimes.

What do you think? I think I would like to start with the knowledge that God loves us, and God made us as those who can love God, ourselves, and one another. Amen.