

*“Curiouser and Curiouser!”* — Alice in Wonderland

Our Soul Matters theme for the month of May is “Awakening Curiosity.” I am curious about curiosity. Why do some people seem to have lots of it, and others not so much? Is curiosity a virtue? How can it be cultivated? What is the relationship between curiosity and wonder? Does curiosity have a shadow side? These are just a few of the questions I have.

I used to think that curiosity was inherent in human nature, that it couldn't be lost or forfeited or destroyed, but a few years ago, I had a conversation with someone who called me out and corrected this assumption. “For some people,” she said, “curiosity is too dangerous to indulge.” They have learned to accept things as they are, without wondering about deeper layers of meaning or possibility. Curiosity, she seemed to be saying, was a luxury that some people couldn't afford. Could it be that a *lack* of curiosity is the key to being satisfied with the way things are? Rather than stirring up trouble by poking around with all kinds of questions, should we just be content with the *status quo*? I had trouble accepting her argument at the time, and I still struggle with the idea. As a result of that conversation, I have come to appreciate and respect how the exercise of curiosity might be experienced as a threat for some people, but I still deeply value the spirit of open, humble inquiry.

As far as I'm concerned, there's no excuse for boredom. Boredom, the Buddhists say, is itself an invitation to spiritual practice. Be curious about boredom! There is literally no end to curiosity. Remember Robert Louis Stevenson's admonition in *A Child's Garden of Verses*:

*“The world is so full of a number of things, I'm sure we should all be as happy as kings.”*

I am endlessly curious about people and places and things. Upon meeting someone new, I usually ask them where they are from – not because I want to pigeonhole them within a geographical category, but because knowing and naming a *place* is often the prelude to a spiritual journey, a journey that unfolds in the form of stories, fascinating and interconnecting narratives that help create community. I sometimes ask where people went to school, not because I want to rank them according to the U.S. News & World Report's academic ratings, but because I know that education has been a powerful and transformative experience in my life, and I am curious about what they have learned on their journey. Of course, often our most meaningful and significant learning experiences take place far from the classroom, so I am also curious about that part of everyone's story. “What is your work?” is another invitation to explore together in the spirit of curiosity. As a natural introvert, I don't generally go poking around in people's private business, unless invited. But as someone who is also naturally curious, I welcome the opportunity to explore together the questions that matter most in our lives. What are you curious about?

In Faith and Fellowship,

Rev. Bruce