

- I'm excited to see you this morning! I'm always pleased to see people here at Grace, but especially on this day—our 'fall kick-off' Sunday! In one respect, churches are like schools: when autumn comes, we resume—or begin—events and programs that will continue until spring. And so, today, we begin a new program year.
- Now, it's not that we close the church during the summer! But summer is when many of us go away for vacation, and pull back from other activities. It is the season when we feel most free to give ourselves to [delight](#) and [wonder](#). Summer is for [dreaming](#) and [imagining](#). Even if only briefly, we step away from our *usual* activities, allowing us to rest, and see new things and places. I hope your summer was graced with such moments.
- Looking ahead to autumn, I find myself thinking again about a book I've mentioned before. Its title is [Curious](#), by Ian Leslie. [Curiosity can seem a lot like wonder and delight](#), these attractive attributes we associate with summer days, their gentle evenings, and all that goes with them. Our thoughts may *drift* at such times, and curiosity involves a similar flexibility. As I allow my attention to [wander](#), and explore whatever occurs to me, my stress is reduced and I'm more 'in the moment.'
- Leslie's book encourages us to [to distinguish between two kinds of curiosity](#). The [first](#) is the '[wandering](#)' kind I have just been describing.¹ Through internet searches we gratify this kind of curiosity, in a way no one in history has been able to do before. Even with just a phone in my hand, I can access virtually all of the information possessed by humankind—in no particular order, and in small, bite-size pieces!
- The [other](#) form of curiosity is the one Leslie commends.² [If the first kind involves an impulse to gather data and information, the second kind of curiosity seeks knowledge and understanding, and leads to wisdom](#). The

basic contrast here is between collecting information, and assimilating knowledge.

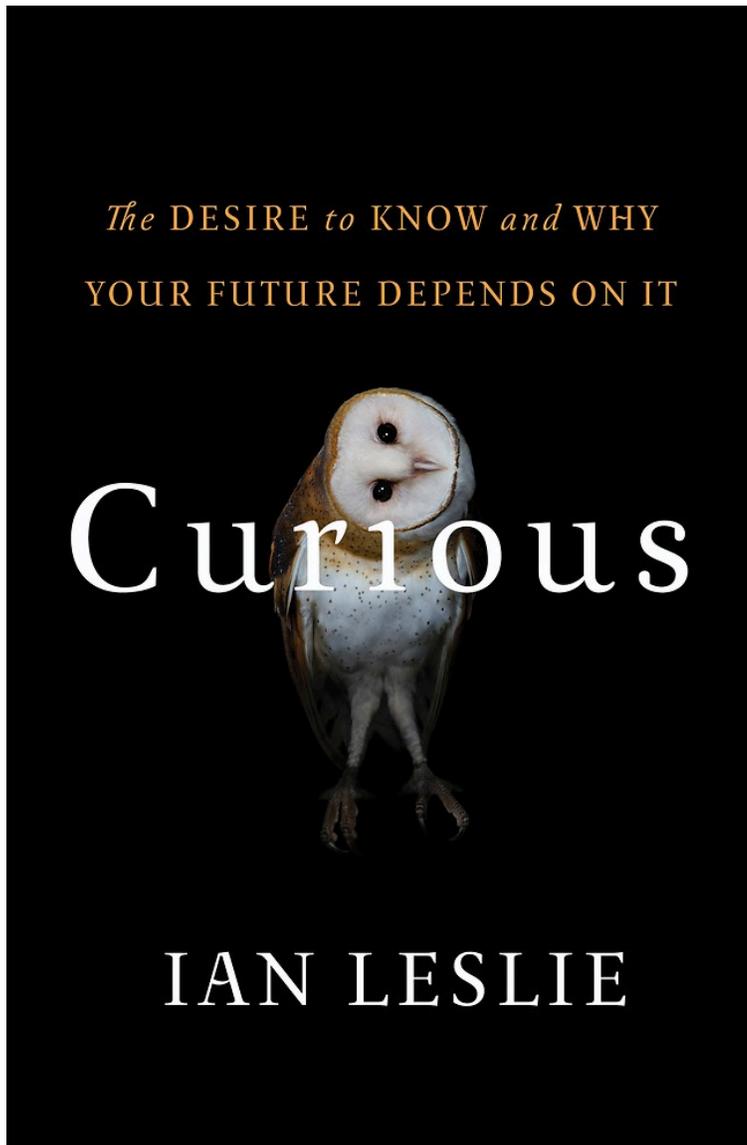
- If your experience is like mine, enjoying summer comes from being less bound by our usual occupations. We're then more likely to indulge our delight and wonder at what we stumble upon. In the process, we allow ourselves to be curious about *random* things, which aren't urgent or serious. But, as we move into autumn and beyond, we may yearn for *more*. Not content to wander over what attracts our attention, we want to see. And we want to see with insight and perception. As the book-reviewer, Philip Broughton, says, people who are curious in this second way "see life as a mystery to be patiently explored and dimly understood, rather than mastered with a how-to list. They invest in acquiring the ... tools with which to tackle difficult problems... and are always asking the 'why' as well as the 'what' questions."³
- Leslie's distinction between two kinds of curiosity fits nicely with what our autumn kick-off is all about. For we are moving from the season of pleasant wandering, to a time for intentional wondering. Next week, we return to our regular Formation offerings for all ages, and our resumption of youth and other recurring group activities. As we do, we transition toward meeting the deeper need we *all* have. Not only do we delight and wonder in all that God has made. We also yearn to know our Maker, and to know why our Maker has put so many things in patterned ways that imply purpose and meaning. We want to explore these patterned ways, and journey into a deeper understanding of God's purposes. This takes time for learning and reflection.
- This second kind of curiosity is just as important for faith as it is for science. Paraphrasing one of my favorite collects from *The Book of Common Prayer*, through science-based learning we study "the universe with all its marvelous

order, its atoms, worlds, and galaxies, and the infinite complexity of living creatures." And *through* our [faith-journey](#), we explore the mysteries of God's creation, *so that we may come to know God more truly, and more surely fulfill our role in God's eternal purpose*.⁴ Deep and reflective curiosity allows for these twin forms of knowledge and understanding to develop, especially as we develop them in a worshipping community.

- Clearly, we live at time when many perceive and believe our society is deeply rent between peoples of differing views about the world, about religion and politics, and the role of institutions in both. [Today's Gospel centers on reconciliation, but on reconciliation in the particular context of the Church. Reconciliation is inescapably central to our life together in the Body of Christ.](#) For "we who are many are *one body*, for we all partake of the one bread."⁵ We reach out in reconciliation to express our unity in Christ.
- Today's Gospel concerns [how we pursue reconciliation as we engage differences and conflict between us in the Church](#). Reconciliation acknowledges sin and its effect upon the community by helping to address these challenges. While acknowledging this fact, and without disrespecting it, I think we can *extend* the benefit of our Gospel to [other differences between us](#), differences that are *not* about manners or ethics, or about church norms and policies. For [we have differences of a less contentious kind](#), differences of philosophy and theology, differences of political temperament and aesthetic appreciation. *What, then, might Jesus' words to the Church in Matthew 18 have to say to us, in this wider context?*
- I can identify [three things that bear upon how we might let our deeper curiosity lead us together into greater understanding and shared wisdom](#).
- [First](#), because of our *common* Baptism into *one* Lord, we share [a mutual accountability to a higher Truth](#). God's authority is higher than the kind we

find in human institutions or alliances. In One Spirit, we mutually defer to One Lord, who seeks to lead and guide us *together*. All real wisdom, and all truth, has its source the Holy One.

- Second, because of our *less-than-whole* moral and spiritual condition, we benefit by confessing our sins together. It leads us to recognize how the road to our unity is paved by our *shared* acknowledgement of sin.
- Third, by pursuing our *deeper curiosity* about the meaning and purpose through which God has made all things, we discern a common End toward which we are headed. As we stand around a common altar now, someday through God's mercy and grace, we'll stand *together* 'round the throne of the Lamb before the great I AM. We'll be reconciled *in Him*, with God, and one another, where all things realize their fullest potential.
- Reconciliation occurs in many spheres: these include social and relational, moral, emotional and intellectual forms of reconciliation. But whatever kind it is, reconciliation is always reconciliation in relation to Truth. And we only get to Truth by pursuing our deeper curiosity—not just for data and information, but for wisdom and understanding, as they are anchored in God. Today, we resume our *shared intentional journey* into this deeper unity of understanding. As we do, we will engage in wonder, not simply about the mysterious things we find around us. Intentionally, we will wonder about the mysteries latent in Creation and in God's Providence. And, we will purposefully contemplate our place in God's strange and beautiful mission in the world.



Two Kinds of Curiosity:

Pleasant Wandering ~ the impulse to gather data and information, wherever we may find or stumble upon it, and in no particular order / collecting data / responding to the "what" question

Intentional Wondering ~ the search for knowledge and understanding, especially through the discernment of pattern and interconnected meaning / assimilating wisdom / responding to the "why" question

A prayer for knowledge of God's Creation:

Almighty and everlasting God, you made the universe with all its marvelous order, its atoms, worlds, and galaxies, and the infinite complexity of living creatures: Grant that, as we probe the mysteries of your creation, we may come to know you more truly, and more surely fulfill our role in your eternal purpose; in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Matthew 18:15-20

Jesus said, “If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”

Notes:

¹ What he calls “diversive curiosity,” which I think might rightly also be called “discursive curiosity.”

² He calls the second kind of curiosity “epistemic curiosity.”

³ See “Book Review: ‘Curious’ by Ian Leslie,” by Philip Delves Broughton, in *The Wall Street Journal*, September 4, 2014. Emphasis. added.

⁴ A quote from, and paraphrase of, Prayer 40, *For Knowledge of God’s Creation*, in *The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 827.

⁵ 1 Corinthians 10:17. See the same theme in 1 Cor. 12:12-13, 27; Rom. 12:4-5.