

2014 Lent Wednesday 1
John 3:1-17

Our neighbors have questions. Questions of faith, Questions of Jesus, Questions of this church stuff. We might have some questions ourselves. I hope we do. I sincerely think that if we have stopped asking questions, then our faith has died.

But back to the neighbor. What do you say when someone asks about your faith? When someone asks about Jesus? When someone asks about the cross? What do you say when someone *doesn't* ask?

During these Wednesdays, we are talking about evangelism, the sharing of our faith, the sharing of the good news of God in Jesus. We will explore the what, where, who, how and why of evangelism.

Today – What. What do you say when someone asks?

In order to answer that question, you have to answer some other “what” questions first.

What do you believe? What is faith about? What is Jesus about? What is the cross about?

Well, I can tell you what the ELCA professes, you can pull out the Creeds and know what “Christians” profess, but I can’t tell you what “Lutherans” or “Christians” believe, because each of us interprets things, scripture included, differently. Each of us comes to scripture with different experiences that color our interpretation, whether we intend them to or not.

In the book *Blink*, Malcolm Gladwell tells of studies on racism, ageism, and sexism. Time after time, people had unconscious assumptions that colored their interpretation of events.

Our experiences and assumptions we don’t even know we have color our interpretation. Which is just to say that *your* take on the gospel is exactly that. *Your* take. If someone asks faith questions, you need to know what your experience is with Jesus, with the cross. It is important, I think, to know what the ELCA says, what the LC-MS says, what the Baptist Church says, and so on, but when the rubber hits the road, what do you say?

This is even why we have 4 gospel accounts. We don’t need to try to reconcile the 4 accounts into one all-encompassing account. Each account is written from a particular perspective with a particular audience in mind. Each account approaches the cross from a different perspective and sees the cross as meaningful in different ways. Our neighbors are approaching faith questions from different perspectives, too, and we need to be able to hear where they’re coming from in order to tell the story of Jesus so that it is meaningful to that person.

But first you need to know what it means to you. You need to be able to tell your story. You need to be able to articulate not so much what the cross means to you or what Jesus means to you. You need to be able to articulate how the cross affected you. How Jesus changed you.

So take up pencil and paper. And jot down words that come to mind. You don’t have to form coherent thoughts. Yet. Just jot down images and thoughts. First: the cross. What word comes to mind? What image?

Jesus. What word comes to mind? What image?

God. What word comes to mind? What image?

Church. What word comes to mind? What image?

We could share them with each other, but I have a hunch that will just muddy our own perspective, as we think, “Oh, yeah. Of course that’s true. Oh, now I’m thinkin!” And then we’re trying to tell a story with too many perspectives, too many themes.

So instead I want you to take your list home and start to form those images into more coherent thoughts and then sentences that you can tell someone else. When Nicodemus comes to you in the middle of the night, you have the words to offer.

One last thought: we’ve pondered the question of what to say when someone asks. But what do you say when someone *doesn’t* ask? I’m sure there are lots of ways we can start that conversation, but it’s never going to go as far as it would if the other initiated it. So how about this: If someone doesn’t ask these questions of faith, we just say, “How can I help?”