



Why?

Mark 13:1-8

Sunday, November 18th, 2018

26th Sunday after Pentecost and 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time (Proper 27)

First Federated Church of Peoria, Illinois

The Rev. Dr. Forrest Krummel

When my daughters were young I could have sworn that they were trying to drive me insane because each one went through a phase of asking, “Why?”

“Why this?” and “Why that?”

They were not being mean spirited, they were simply exploring their world; trying to make sense of it, or at least find the logic; if there was either a rhyme or reason.

Now, I never wanted to be one of those parents who said, “Because I said so” or “Because I’m the daddy.” I always thought that to be a “cheap out.”

In a recent Forbes magazine article Natalie Hahn wrote that “Why” is the ultimate clarifying question.¹

In the third most viewed Ted Talk, Simon Sinek called “Why?” the center of the “Golden Circle”.

“Why is Apple so innovative?” he asked. “Year, after year, after year, they are more innovative than all of their competition. And yet, they are just a computer company. They are just like everyone else. They have the same access to the same talent, the same agency, the same consultants, the same media; and yet why is it that they seem to have something different?”

“And why is it that Martin Luther King, Jr. led the civil rights movement? He wasn’t the only man who suffered in a pre-civil rights America, and he certainly wasn’t the only great orator of the day. Why him?”

“And why is it that the Wright brothers were able to figure out controlled powered manned flight when there were certainly better teams who were better qualified and better funded, and they didn’t achieve powered flight. The Wright brothers beat them to it.”

There are three elements at play which are best illustrated in the well-worn story of “holiday ham.

¹ Natalie Hahn <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescommunicationscouncil/2017/03/10/the-power-of-asking-why-to-improve-your-business-and-communications/#5165c02d262e>

STORY

What Apple, Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Wright Brothers had in common is that they understood their “Why.” They knew their cause, their core values, their reason to exist, or purpose.²

The most challenging questions that any church faces is a form of the “why question,

“If this church were to cease to exist, who would miss it?”

“What “hole” would be left in the community?”

“What wouldn’t get done?”

And finally, “What is the congregation’s driving passion?”

Keep those questions in mind as we turn to our gospel lesson.

The lesson comes right after Jesus confronted the religious leaders that they were more concerned with their status and appearances than with their calling or purpose. In other words, they lost their “why”.

Last week we heard Jesus thunder,

Beware of those who like to walk about giving orders, preening in the radiance of public flattery, basking in prominent positions and sitting at the head table.

All the time they exploit the naive, the weak, and the helpless.

When God first called “Hebrews” to be a “chosen people”, they were called to be a “light to the nations” so that the message of God’s saving love would be known to the ends of the earth. (Isaiah 49:5 & 6)

Over the course of time, they became comfortable in the “land of milk and honey”, and their light was slowly extinguished.

But, just because their light was extinguished, just because their passion grew cold, God’s purpose could not be extinguished nor could it grow cold. At the right time God became one “with us” and one “of us” in the birth of Jesus Christ.

As the writer of the gospel of John said of Jesus:

Before time itself was measured, the Word was speaking.

The Word was and is God.

This eternal Word remained ever present with the Creator;

The Word shaped the entire cosmos.

Immersed in the practice of creating,

all things that exist were birthed through Him.

The Word filled all things with a living, breathing light--

A light that thrives in the depths of darkness, blazes through murky bottoms.

It cannot be quenched. (The Voice, John 1: 1-5)

In his "Sermon on the Mount" Jesus, the Light that came into the world, said to the gathered, those who decide to take him seriously,

"You are the light of the world..."

Let your light so shine that the world may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 5:13)

Two stories. One is about losing your Light, your Purpose, your Why. The other is about being Light.

Once upon a time on a dangerous sea coast where shipwrecks often occur there was a once crude little life-saving station. The building was just a hut, and there was only one boat but the few devoted members kept a constant watch over the sea, and with no thought for themselves went out day and night tirelessly searching for the lost. Some of those who were saved and various others in the surrounding area wanted to become associated with the station and give of their time and money and effort for the support of its work. New boats were bought and new crews trained. The little life saving station grew.

Some of the members of the life-saving station were unhappy that the building was so crude and poorly equipped. They felt that a more comfortable place should be provided as the first refuge of those saved from the sea. They replaced the emergency cots with beds and put better furniture in the enlarged building. Now the life-saving station became a popular gathering place for its members, and they decorated it beautifully and furnished it exquisitely, because they used it as a sort of club. Fewer members were not interested in going to sea on life-saving missions, so they hired lifeboat crews to do this work. The life-saving motif still prevailed in the club's decoration, and there was a liturgical lifeboat in the room where the club initiations were held. About this time a large ship was wrecked off the coast, and the hired crews brought in boat loads of cold, wet and half-drowned people. There were dirty and sick and they messed up the beautiful new clubhouse. A committee soon met and had a shower house built outside the club where victims of shipwreck could be cleaned up before coming inside.

At the next meeting, there was a split in the club membership. Most of the members wanted to stop the club's life-saving activities as being unpleasant and a hindrance to the normal social life of the club. Some members insisted upon life-saving as their primary purpose and pointed out that they were still called a life-saving station. But they were voted down and told that if they wanted to save lives of all the various kinds of people who were shipwrecked in those waters, they could begin their own life saving station down the coast. They did.

As the years went by, the new station experienced the same trajectory that had occurred in the old life-saving station. It evolved into a club, and yet, another life-saving station was founded. History continued to repeat itself, and if you visit the sea coast today, you will find a number of exclusive clubs along the shore. Shipwrecks are still frequent in those waters, but most of the people drown. (Right-On Ideas for Youth Groups by Wayne Rice and Mike Yaconelli)

The second story; a story about being Light.

Several centuries ago in a mountain village in Europe, a wealthy nobleman wondered what legacy he should leave to his townspeople. He made a good decision. He decided to build them a church. No one was permitted to see the plans or the inside of the church until it was finished. At its grand opening, the people gathered and marveled at the beauty of the new church.

Everything had been thought of and included. It was a masterpiece.

But then someone said, "Wait a minute! Where are the lamps? It is really quite dark in here. How will the church be lighted?" The nobleman pointed to some brackets in the walls, and then he gave each family a lamp, which they were to bring with them each time they came to worship. "Each time you are here" the nobleman said, "the place where you are seated will be lighted. Each time you are not here, that place will be dark. This is to remind you that whenever you fail to come to church, some part of God's house will be dark." ³

You are the light of the world. Be light. Let no cares or concerns of this world dim your light. Let it shine brightly. Let the light of God's eternal, unconditional love shine through you--every day, every moment, every second of your life. Do it for the glory of God.

Amen.

³ <http://www.sermonsplus.co.uk/Illustrations.htm> Rev'd Jim Pye, The Rectory, 15, St. Martin's Road, Knebworth, Herts. SG3 6ER Telephone: 01438-817396