

GETTING TO THE CORE: "WHY"

Luke 4:14-21

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(Show Video--<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dhXtG13gPfc>)

So—how many of you parents can relate?

I think one of the first questions a child utters is that one-word question, "Why"? And I don't think it's only because of their limited vocabulary. It's not that it's just easier to say the word, "Why". And I don't think it's because our children want to confound or exasperate adults, even if it feels like it. No—I think the reason that children ask the question "Why?" so often is because they're filled with wonder! I mean—it's not by accident that we call our young children's worship "Children Worship and...Wonder"? Our children are filled with wonder about the world and everything in it...and their little minds are wide open to learning all about it! In fact, I read this week that most 3-5 year olds ask their parents an average of 100 questions a day... (makes me exhausted just thinking of it!).

But I read something else quite interesting this week. Studies show that children's level of questioning drops off significantly during their school years...and suggested it's because our educational environment is more focused on learning the correct answers than it is about encouraging students to ask questions.

And as we continue to grow older, that seems to be our course of action in life as well. I mean, more often than not, it seems we're more interested in "fixing" things...we're more interested in treating the symptoms of a problem ...than we are in discovering why things are the way they are in the first place. And this isn't only about solving "problems" per se...it's about everything...it's about the decisions that we make...about what we do for a living...and who we're in relationship with...and what we buy...and what we think we need ...all based upon our assumptions of what we think we

know. But as author Simon Sinek says, false assumptions based on partial knowledge can lead us astray. We can only make right decisions if we first understand the why.

Simon Sinek. If you're a fan of Ted Talks, you may have heard of Simon Sinek. A few years ago Simon gave a Ted Talk entitled, "How Great Leaders Inspire Action." And one of the things he did...was to explain this whole concept of understanding the importance of starting with "Why." He illustrated it with something he calls The Golden Circle.

Here's what Sinek says: "Whether they realize it or not, all great and inspiring leaders and organizations think, act and communicate in the same way...and it is the complete opposite from everyone else.

Every single organization on the planet, even our own careers, function on three levels:

1. What we do.
2. How we do it, and
3. Why we do it.

Now, when those three pieces are aligned, he says...it gives us a filter through which to make decisions. It provides a foundation for innovation and building trust. When all three pieces are in balance, others will say, with absolute clarity and certainty, "We know who you are," and "We know what you stand for."

So let's take a quick look at each of these to define them more clearly. First, let's look at What. Every organization and individual knows What they do. For an organization, it's their product or service...for an individual it's their job or their role. That's the easy one and all of us know it well.

Then we come to How. Now, not all...but Some organizations and individuals know How they do what they do. So what are we talking about when we are talking

about How? The Hows are an organization's or an individual's strengths, values or guiding principles. These the are things they feel set them apart from others; they're the things that they think make them special or different from everyone else.

And finally, there's Why. And here's what Simon Sinek says about that. He says, "Very few people and very few organizations can clearly articulate Why they do what they do. Why is a purpose...a cause...a belief. It provides a clear answer to the questions, "Why do you get out of bed every morning?" "Why does your organization exist?" and "Why should that matter to anyone else?"

The Why is about our contribution to impact and serve others. And here's the thing: the Why...is what inspires us.

Now, here's what happens. People naturally communicate from the outside-in; they typically go from what is easiest to understand to what's hardest to understand and explain. So they tell people What they do...they may even tell them How they're different or better...and then they expect a behavior to follow: to purchase a product...to vote for a candidate...or to support an institution.

But here's the thing. Most people never get to Why. And if we don't get there...then we might not have the full picture so that we know where we should be going. Simon says: know your Why! That is what will guide you to know where you should go and what you should do.//

Know your why. Jesus knew his why. He knew why he was on planet earth and he was able to articulate his "why" and inspire others because of it. We find that in our scripture reading today. But before we unpack that, I want to give you the context that leads up to our reading. Jesus had just been baptized. And as he came up from the waters, we are told in Luke chapter 3 that the Holy Spirit descended upon him and Jesus heard a voice from heaven say, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." And immediately following his baptism, we are told that Jesus goes into the

wilderness, where for forty days he is tested and tempted by the devil to move away from his purpose...his why: he's tempted to be concerned not with his mission as God's beloved but with self-preservation and vain glory. But Jesus stands up to every test. During the temptation, we see Jesus' HOW...the guiding principles and values that keep him aligned with his WHY. And to those temptations he respond this way: "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only God."

And it's only then...after Jesus receives his mission and tests his convictions that God sends him to Galilee to begin his ministry...his WHAT. And that's where our reading for today picks up. Jesus enters the synagogue on the Sabbath...and he stands up and reads the scroll of the prophet Isaiah which says:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me
To preach the gospel to the poor.
To heal the brokenhearted
He has sent me to proclaim deliverance to the captives
And recovery of sight to the blind,
To let the oppressed go free,
To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

And we are told that Jesus rolls up the scroll, gives it back to the attendant, and sits down. And everybody's looking at him. Something's going on here. And then Jesus says, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Jesus knew his WHY. He was crystal clear about his purpose...which made him assured of his convictions...which led him to know what God wanted him to do. Do you see how that works?

That's what you and I are called to do. To know why we exist...why we're here...to be assured of our convictions, our guiding principles ...so that we will know what to do. //

This morning we celebrate the baptism of Victoria Parks. And this is a day that Victoria will never forget. It's a wonderful day...a day full of wonder! For this is the day

when Victoria has heard God say, “This is my beloved...this is my child.” She’ll never forget stepping into the water and being totally immersed in it...coming up, drenched, soaking wet with God’s love. And she’ll remember that faith in God means dying to self and rising into a new life in the Spirit. She’ll never forget this day of celebration and love. She’ll never forget it...because Victoria knows her why. She is God’s beloved...and that knowledge has the power to shape her life and her decisions from this day forward.

And I hope today, as each of us witnesses this baptism, that those of us who have been baptized will remember our own baptism. I hope that you will remember getting soaking wet. I hope you’ll remember the waters that engulfed you with God’s love and grace. I hope you will remember your call to follow Jesus. I hope you will remember your why...and that you will be guided by your core values and convictions...so that you will know what to do with your life and live into your purpose.

But today, I also want you to know that there is a “why” for us as a congregation: a “Why” that will inspire and lead us to God’s vision...God’s preferred future for Florence Christian Church. And unless we know this Why...unless we embrace it...we might miss the mark of where God is truly calling us forward in mission and vision for the future.

How many of you know FCC’s mission statement? If you don’t, you need to! Because that statement sums up our reason for being here...not just for today but every day. Take a look at your bulletin. Turn to the back page and look at the bottom. What does it say? Let’s read it together: “Florence Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) celebrates God’s welcome table of abundant love, grace and acceptance.”

Florence Christian Church celebrates...to “celebrate” means to make known publicly...to proclaim...to joyfully participate...in what? God’s welcome table...think of being invited and welcomed into the very heart of God...a heart that is full...abundantly full of love...and grace...and acceptance!

That's what we're about. That's our why! Publicly proclaiming and joyfully participating in what God is all about! And you know what friends? That...our Why...is inspiring! And it's not only inspiring...it is sorely needed in our world today. People are hungry for the abundant love, grace and acceptance that God offers. They're desperately looking for it, even if they don't yet know what it is. And if we as a church get...that God's welcome table of abundant love, grace and acceptance is ours to celebrate...to make known publicly...to proclaim...to joyfully participate in...and share...more and more people like Victoria will come and hear God say, "You are my beloved. Come, and follow me."

I want to close with a story that took place in Alabama, but it just as easily could be shared about many people that I've encountered here over the past two years. But for the sake of protecting confidentiality, I'm going to share this story about someone I'll call Judy. Judy started coming to our church following an invitation by her co-worker. I noticed that just about every Sunday, Judy would be sitting in the back, fully engaged, but by the end of the service, she was in tears. I knew she was feeling things very deeply, and after a few weeks, I asked if we could get together for a cup of coffee.

So we went to Starbucks. And I told Judy how much I appreciated her coming to church and wanted to get to know her better. I invited her to share her story with me. And then, Judy began to open up and tell me about her life. She'd had a hard one. Drug and alcohol addiction, mental illness, rejection by her family and her church because she was gay, and her spiral out of control that eventually led to spending time in prison.

Judy felt worthless...until someone from our church shared God's love and grace with her and told her that there was a place and a people that would love her and accept her...no matter what! Judy told me she was scared, but she came with her new friend, and she found out that what she had been told about the church was true. And God's

love and grace and acceptance washed over her...and every week her tears helped her to release those horrible chains that bound her. As she finished telling me her story, Judy said, "Pastor Susan, First Christian Church has saved my life. I mean, literally. I don't think I'd be here today if it weren't for God working through you all."

And that day, I was reminded of something critical...something crucial that I must never forget: Friends, we're not just here to play church. We're not just here to be a social club or a community service organization. We're here for something much greater than that. We're here to save lives through the abundant love, grace and acceptance that our welcoming God offers to everyone. And every decision we make...every thing we do...every move we make as we journey into God's preferred future for our congregation...has to start there.

We've got to start...with Why!