

Problem: For many who turn to faith, they are not given a chance to ask important questions. They are immediately told answers.

-I remember when living in London, England and coming/going from the big Camden Town Tube station that was close by to where I lived, frequently seeing a roughly dressed bearded man who always wore an orange visibility vest and holding a cardboard sign which read: "Jesus Saves....Be Careful." I remember thinking to myself: "Wow, why should I be careful? How does Jesus save me? Doesn't Jesus love me too?" The sign seemed unsettling for me and I didn't quite know why. One of the regrets that I have was that due to the busyness of the place and my own schedule, I was never able to talk with the guy whom I am sure saw more than 50 times while getting on the subway.

-Faith, at least for me and maybe for you too, always is surrounded by questions. Maybe then we Christians are too quick to provide answers right away.

Solution: Jesus' ministry starts with a question: What are you seeking? From this question, Jesus proclaims "Come and see." This is very different from what our culture is used to.

-In the gospel of John, interestingly enough, the beginning of Jesus' ministry is a little different from that of the other gospels. It doesn't start with Jesus interpreting scripture and almost getting thrown off a cliff like in Luke, or with the calling of the disciples like in Matthew. It actually starts with a question. "When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" (verse 38) "What are you looking for?" are the first words that Jesus says.

-"I'm actually going to retranslate this question slightly because I think a more accurate way of understanding *zeteo* (the word that Jesus uses) is "to seek". What are you seeking?

- What a fascinating and scary question! What are you seeking in your life right now? What are we seeking as a church?

-I remember the struggle of being a hospital chaplain in seminary, each seminarian in the Lutheran Church is required to fulfill 450 hours working with patients and their families in a hospital. It is a time of real intensity and our supervisor was a master at never ending a supervision with us until we were able to phrase a personal question to think about. I had one patient who had stage 4 Leukemia and who had three little girls. In talking with him, I became frustrated with his continual sense of denial which he showed in watching sports almost 24/7. His little girls would come in and sit next to him, play with toys or color in their coloring books and he would barely say two words to them. I as the chaplain tried to encourage him to talk with his girls about how he was feeling, tell stories of his childhood, and maybe most importantly have important conversations about death. He refused all encouragement from me. I took my utter frustration and anger to my supervisor who took my suggestions of "having an

intervention” and me “using the bible to prove more of my argument to him” and gently put them aside. I remember clearly him saying to me: “what are you searching for in this situation? Why is this important to you?” I, at first, was upset with my supervisor. Why on earth would he say this?! I am just trying to teach and spread the word of God! As my supervisor continued to ask these questions, they finally began to sink in. What I wanted more than anything else was not for me to preach to this guy, but for his little girls to have a connection beyond the sports and know their father more intimately, especially since the time left was precious. I was able to state this answer to my supervisor’s question in another supervision meeting and his answer to me was simple: “it sounds like they need a savior in their family right now. That savior is there with them now. Just remember it’s not you. Maybe it’s time for you to go see where that savior is.”

-What was so impactful for me hearing these words from my supervisor was not only the question that he posed (what are you seeking) but also the answer.

- Jesus sets up a similar scene for us after his first words of “what are you seeking?” Following this question to the disciples of John the Baptist who were following Jesus, they answer him in an interesting way: “where are you staying?” Again, the bible geek in me goes a little crazy because they aren’t asking Jesus what Holiday Inn he’s staying at. The word that they use is *meno* (where we get the english word *remain*). His disciples are remembering the Advent promise of *Immanu-el* (God abides with us) and are in turn asking Jesus (who is the Son of God), where does he *abide*.

-Here is the really cool part: Jesus doesn’t give a coded, mythological answer (which is a little unusual for the Gospel of John as it is so packed with symbolism). Instead he gives a three word answer: “Come and see”. Jesus’ ministry has now begun.

-What are you seeking? A savior? Come and see where this savior abides.....it may surprise you.

Implication: How do we pose the “what are you seeking” question to others? How can we as a church say “come and see”?

-Following those last supervision meetings, I went back to this father and his girls. He was well enough to be discharged from the hospital the next day. He and I exchanged pleasantries and I wished him well at the end of our visit. As I was leaving the hospital room he said: “My girls hugged me really tightly today.” He began to tear up as he said: “That’s lifted me up this whole day today.” I saw Jesus the savior abiding in this man’s eyes.

-In our society today, I feel we become too quick to give answers and not quick enough to ask the questions. “Jesus saves” has become an easy phrase and answer to everything. “What are you seeking?” is harder to pose, but I think much more powerful.

-How do we as a church ask this question to those coming through our doors? How do we engage people in our community with this question?

-After this experience with this father I went back to my supervisor and thanked him for not giving me straight up answers, but allow me to think more deeply about the questions. His statement to me was: "Ministry is mostly about empowering others to ask the questions and not about telling the answers."

-May we be freed to think about Jesus' question to each and everyone of us in a deeper and profound way: "what are we seeking?" May we be able to keep each other accountable as a church to never lose sight of this question.

-Finally may we not be too quick to jump to the "Jesus saves" answer, and instead take a cue from Jesus himself in saying: "Whatever you are seeking, come and see where it abides in new and surprising ways with us." Amen.