

Year C, May 12, 2019
4 Easter
Christ Church, Mexia

Charles Swindoll tells the following story:

I decided one day that I would present the gospel to a doctor friend as we had lunch together. I drew a simple little chart that had on one side of the page a circle – God – and wrote under it *holy*. Then on the other side of the page I drew a circle representing the world – mankind – and under it the word *unholy*. And then I built a bridge between God and mankind with a cross and wrote the name of Christ across the horizontal bar of the cross. I was so careful to keep it simple.

After lunch, I slid it across the table at that restaurant. My heart was just in my throat. I thought, he's going to believe. He's going to love this! He looked at (the drawing), studied it for a few seconds, and he smiled and said, 'In a thousand years I could never believe that.' Couldn't have been more clear or simple, but he couldn't have been further from interest in that truth. And I said, 'Have you ever seen that before?' He said, 'No. Never in my life. Never seen it and I'm not interested.' (Swindoll, 615)

"I have told you, and you do not believe." This is Jesus' answer to the request of the Jews in the Temple, "If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." And I suppose it would be "logical" at this point to ask why Jesus did not just answer – "Yes, I'm the Messiah!" Do you think they would have believed him, if he had? How many of you believe in Jesus simply because someone told you about him? I suspect that very few of you do.

And recall for a moment what the people of that time expected from the Messiah. They expected a warrior king, like David – someone from David's line, in fact, - to take over, throw out the Romans and anyone else who tries to rule them again, and to return Israel to the good old

days of independence and prosperity. But we know Jesus isn't going to do that. They certainly do not expect the Messiah to be crucified on the cross, any more than they expect love to be the way we should resolve conflict rather than violence. So maybe that's why he answered the way he did. If he had given them that answer, what would have happened when he was crucified? Extreme disbelief, I imagine – a disbelief that would have been even harder to overcome than the uncertainty they expressed.

So what are the implications for us today, when we try to share the message about God and Jesus in our world, our rather skeptical, self-centered, disinterested world? Before I attempt to address that question however, let me share with you a passage from Alan Loy McGinnis' book, *Bringing Out the Best in People*: "(Saint) Thomas Aquinas, who knew a great deal about education and a bit about motivation, once said that when you want to convert a person to your view, you go over to where he (or she) is standing, take him (or her) by the hand, and guide him (or her). You don't order (someone) to come over to where you are. You start where (he/she) is and work from that position. (Aquinas) said that's the only way to get people to budge (from their beliefs or positions)."

Add to that the principle that we can only speak with unequivocal certainty about things the human mind can grasp. And God is not one of those things. God is beyond human understanding, even to those of us who know God, or want to know God. So, it is hard to tell people about God "plainly." Will Campbell, a Baptist preacher once said that if Moses had told people about his experience with the burning bush, it is most likely that they would have said, "It's time for Thorazine."

Thus, it is most likely through our works that we have the best chance to introduce others to Jesus and God. And isn't that what Jesus explains in the gospel reading this morning? "The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me..." but, he adds, you don't understand, only the people who know me get it. Even deeds, works, don't always convey the message, but an Episcopal Priest, Gary Jones, points out that the early church grew, not because multitudes were convinced of the truth of creeds and dogma, but because they experienced the living God - often through others and what they did. And I suspect you probably came to know Jesus, know God, through some experience, rather than just words. Because when we encounter a way of life that involves reconciliation, liberation, inclusion, healing and justice, how can we not be drawn to that community, that way of life?

Fr. Jones also tells of a parable told by the Jesuit Priest Anthony DeMello entitled "The Explorer":

In it, a person leaves his village to explore the faraway and exotic Amazon. When he returns to his village, the villagers are captivated as the explorer tries to describe his many experiences, along with the incredible beauty of the place, with its thundering waterfalls, beautiful foliage, and extraordinary wildlife. How can he put into words, though, the feelings that flooded his heart when he heard the night sounds of the forest or sensed the dangers of the rapids? So, he tells them they simply must go to the Amazon themselves. (FotW, 448)

People may ask us to tell them plainly about God or our religion, or we may want to share our knowledge and experience with them: and maybe we will be able eloquently to share our experience and our journey. But more importantly, we can go to them, take their hand, and help them to get started on their own journey, so that they may experience the living God themselves. Like Jesus, invite them "to come and see."

In the name of the one God, the Creator, the Word and the Spirit.

Amen.