

Third Sunday of Easter
Vicar Thomas K. Holdcraft

Sunday, April 18, 2010
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Acts 9:1–6 [7–20]; Psalm 30
Revelation 5:11–14; John 21:1–19

Most of us have heard the statement, “There is no such thing as a dumb question.”

Now, I am hoping that you can help because when I use a quote from a movie I like to give credit but I cannot find out where I heard this statement. “There is no such thing as a dumb question...only dumb people who ask questions.” Anybody know? It is embarrassing to tell you that whenever anyone says, “There is no such thing as a dumb question,” I think of the add-on from the movie. Why is that? Why is it hard to ask questions?

Questions are good. We direct our children to ask questions to their teachers when they are not sure what to do. A person in the hospital should ask a question to his doctor if he is unsure of medicines, or surgery, or need of a second opinion. Yet questions also seem to be difficult for us to ask at times. One reason may be because of the unfortunate perception we feel in having to know all the answers. We would rather drive around the extra hour than admit we need help. Asking questions make one feel inferior and needy.

But isn't it great that we can open up the Word of God, peel away layers and learn something new each time we study and go to church. That is what this Sunday's texts have done. We have been shown the power that comes to the person asking the question. Or even better, we have been shown that the power is not in necessarily having all the answers, the power is in the question. Especially when we listen to what the question is really asking.

One of my favorite stage plays is the “Fiddler on the Roof.” In that story there is a man named Tevye. He is the patriarch of the family, the father and husband. Immediately as the play begins we are told what is most important to Tevye. And that is “Tradition.” He bases virtually his entire life on tradition. His decision making, his authority, virtually his way of life depend on it.

We witness how Tevye's reliance on tradition is slowly dismantled as the story continues. He finds that his three oldest daughters fall in love with men outside of the matchmaker process. The third daughter even marries an outsider, a non-Jew. Tevye is torn now, torn between the love he feels for his daughters, the desire to see them happy, his witness of their love and his lifelong reliance on tradition. He is conflicted in such a way that this man, this patriarch, this staunch Jew that relies on his traditional authority, comes to terms with a crisis. Tevye sits down and asks his wife, Golde, a question. After 25 years of marriage he asks her...“Do you love me?” The power is in the question. “Do you love me?” The question hangs precariously in the air, and yet the question has so much command of the moment.

Think about how a question can command a moment. We are taught that the power is in the answer, but we only need to look at the scripture for today to find how Jesus asks two very influential people very powerful questions.

In the Book of Acts, we are told of the experience that leads to Saul's conversion. Interesting word this "conversion". We sometimes think that conversion means a change of religion. But Saul did not change religions. Saul did convert from forcing people to be like he was. Saul converted from punishing the followers of the Way of Jesus. Saul converted from persecution and murder. He converted from all of that in order to rely on God's grace given through Jesus Christ. A change occurred at Saul's conversion and it was behavior, consciousness, and finally his name.

And all of it started from a question. Jesus said, "Saul, Saul why are you persecuting me?" The power was not in the answer, but there in the question itself. Because what Saul was doing to other people, persecuting them (harassing, beating, bullying), Jesus said you are doing this to me. "Why are you persecuting me?"

Another question is posed from the post-resurrected Jesus. This time the question is asked to Peter by Jesus and that question comes from our reading from John. Peter and the others there by the Sea of Tiberias have seen Jesus in resurrected form already. Yet, somehow they now seem lost. Like they are still unable to ask a question for directions and would rather wander around than *appear* to be lost. But make no doubt, they are once again lost. So they return to what is familiar, they return to fishing. It is what they do and that is tradition. Don't you see how easy it is for us to fall back into the comforts of tradition for tradition's sake alone? We feel lost sometimes. But the sacrament of baptism is tradition that has meaning and purpose today, and for tomorrow.

We were witnesses and participants in a baptism this morning. When Jesus asked "Peter, do you love me more than these?" A powerful question. We can close our eyes and see the disciples gathered around Jesus, the meal, nets, 153 fish, boats on shore, and gear all around. Picture all of it and ask is Jesus looking for a verbal answer or an action? Jesus asks the most powerful questions. Peter answers with words and Jesus responds with commands. Today, we have fulfilled the command that Jesus gave to Peter that morning when he said, "Feed my Lambs." Jacob Christopher is a lamb that has been united with Christ, united with us and we all have been reminded of our own baptisms. New life starts today, because of water, word, and the promises made here in community. We have also begun to undertake Jesus' second command. "Tend my Sheep." To Tend or shepherd means that we ask questions, nurture, and we take care of each other, but not only in a protective, secluded kind of way. We could build a wall around the campus of Trinity and be protected. "Shepherd my sheep" involves travel and journey and inevitable danger. And all the while we receive strength from God's word and the Holy Spirit through water, bread and wine. Then Jesus gives the third command, "Feed my Sheep." I believe this last command has to do with the theme of asking questions. The questions that have power. Come, ask questions about faith,

traditions, and find the meaning of life. How are you fed? What is God calling you to be?

Let us promise to pray for each other. To gather for support and to push the boundaries of our own comforts and call on God to keep the promise that God has made.

Amen.