

## “Getting down to the core”

- During the summer of 2015, (a year before joining you as rector) I traveled to Chicago for a continuing education opportunity
  - It was in the city, and was a joint effort between Seabury-Western seminary and Kellogg Business school
  - It was tailored toward leading a faith-based, non-profit organization.
  - So the seminary handled the faith aspect of things, and the business school contributed non-profit aspect to it
  - With wonderful crossovers such as priests talking about leading parishes
  - And business school teachers speaking about their faith
  - It was a fantastic week!
  - Many things were of use, but I remember one thing rather well and it made a lasting impression on me
  - It was an exercise where we paired off, and asked each other the question, “Why?” five times in rapid succession
  - It was good training for when Gaius got a little older and asked a similar number of “why” questions in a row.
  - The first one or two are easy, but after that you get down into some real good stuff, real deep stuff
  - About your values, motivations, and who you really are
  - And if you’re answering fast enough then there is less time to rationalize, or second guess, or even judge yourself
  - The intent of this exercise was to get us to realize, or discover, one of our core values- that answer to the last “why” question
  - To help us better understand why we do things... who we are... who’s we are
    - *Real quick- I was reminded of something I already knew in these questions, and I learned something new*
    - *The first- I was reminded that sometimes the things I do are because I believe God has called me to do them, and no other reason*
    - *By that point in time, I had been either thinking about being a priest, studying to be a priest, or had been a priest for over 10 years*

- *Because I felt God call.*
- *The new thing learned, and this was back when Gaius was younger and I was pretty new to the whole fatherhood thing*
- *I learned, at the bottom of one series of why questions, was, “because I want to provide for my family.”*
- *This new thing, this responsibility, the realization that with a young child at home, our decisions affected more than just me and Katy*
- *And doing that well was a newly uncovered value for me.*
- It is a good exercise- do it with a trusted friend or spouse, you might have some interesting insights
- This question of why, and to whom we belong, is everywhere in our readings this morning
- One of the rarer times I think when all three coordinate so very well
- There are at least four good answers to who we are at our core, but at each point we are challenged to go one step beyond.
- We are going to start with our reading from first Samuel, where we hear the history of ancient Israel as they transition into a monarchy <sup>1</sup>
  - Prior to this time, Israel had been governed by God, whose ways were made known through judges, elders, priests, and prophets of the day
  - Samuel, the prophet, was getting older, and we know that his sons were not fit to be judges<sup>2</sup>
    - “because they took bribes and perverted justice”
  - So that asked Samuel to give them a king so they could be like the other nations.
  - God was not happy about this, reminding Samuel that God had freed the people from Egypt and they were to serve God
  - The Israelites were to be under the covenant with God, and under God’s kingship <sup>3</sup>
  - And through the prophet warned the people about the ills that a king might bring
    - A king will take your sons and make an army
    - A king will take the good land, and force people to plow for him
    - A king will take your daughters to be servants in the royal household
    - A king will levy taxes... in the end you will be the king’s slaves

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<sup>1</sup> Carol J. Dempsey, *Feasting on the Word*, year B Supplemental Essays, 1

<sup>2</sup> Marianne Blickenstaff, *Feasting on the Word*, year B Supplemental Essays, 1

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.pulpitfiction.com/notes/proper5b>

- But the people did not listen, demanded a king, and so God gave them what they wanted
- Samuel made Saul their first king
- Now that they have a king, in addition to being God's people, they are also the King's subjects
- I think that was Samuel's biggest concern- that the people of Israel would forget who they were first and foremost
- That they would begin to think they belonged to the king rather than being God's people
- Our second reading speaks to another part of who we are, and that is our physical existence
  - This is from Second Corinthians, and is believed to be written by Paul himself before the first gospel was written down<sup>4</sup>
    - Scholars' think about 10 years before the gospel of Mark was recorded
  - It is addressing a major concern of the first Christians, that they believed Jesus would come back before they died
  - And yet, they are getting older and some have died, and Jesus has not returned
  - And I think they worry that perhaps they were mistaken
  - Paul reminds them that they are more than what they see- there is more to them than their bodies
  - He says to not lose hope.
  - That while the outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed
  - That we look not at what can be seen, but what cannot be seen
  - At not what is temporary, but what is eternal
  - Even if Jesus does not return in their life times, it is ok, because there is more to them than this life.
  - That who they are at the core is more than their physical existence
  - They, and we, are more than even that.
- And finally we arrive at our Gospel for the morning, where Jesus takes us further the core of who we are in two more ways
  - We come along side of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark today while he is relatively new in his ministry<sup>5</sup>
  - Jesus has just all twelve disciples, and his reputation as a healer and teacher is beginning to spread

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<sup>4</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pauline\\_epistles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pauline_epistles)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.pulpitfiction.com/notes/proper5b>

- He is famous enough now that there are so many people around him wanting his attention that he cannot even eat
- Two things happen- first, Jesus' family comes to get him, because they think he has lost his mind
- Not the best way to start to a new ministry...
- They are naturally worried because if Jesus continues doing what he is doing, and attracting attention like he is doing
- He will eventually attract the attention of the authorities
- We already have a little foreshadowing of Jesus' fate on the cross, because I bet that is exactly what his family is worried about
- "You're gonna get yourself killed, Jesus! Knock it off." - I can hear Mary saying it
- And while it is a little harsh, Jesus responds, that his family, his brothers, sisters, and mothers, are those that do God's will
- While we are defined by our family relationships, they too are not the final answer to the last "Why" question
- For people of faith, there is more at the core
- Jesus' family were right, however, because the second thing that happens is the Scribes hear about him
- And they come from Jerusalem to find Jesus, and they accuse him of having an evil spirit
- These accusations are getting serious... even possibly deadly<sup>6</sup>, as the sin of blasphemy is not too far away
- The Scribes have decided that Jesus has an evil spirit, because he's not a priest or a Pharisee, so how else could he possibly be doing this?
- The major fault in their argument is that the Holy Spirit cannot work outside of their institutionalized religious box...
- Jesus answers harshly, again, and accuses them of blasphemy against the holy spirit
- It seems that their answer to their last question of "Why", their notion of who they are at their core, is that they are Scribes
- And that too, like the other ones we've mentioned so far today, is not all of who we are as believers
- We are even more than our religion.
- Ok, so we have come through three lessons, and four attempts at answering the final question of "Why?"
  - Why, ultimately, do we do the things we do
  - What defines us, who are we?

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<sup>6</sup> Don E. Saliers, *Feasting on the Word*, Year B Volume 3, Pastoral Perspective, 116

- And each were good answers, but not good enough to be the final answer
- We are more than members of a tribe, nation or kingdom, like the Israelites
- We are more than our fleshly bodies, our physical existence, like the Corinthians
- We are more than members of our families, and more than members of our religions.
- Who are we? Why do we do the things we do?
- I think our calling, our life-long challenge, is to work on the interior of our hearts and souls and minds until our answer is this:
- Because we are children of God.
- Because we follow Jesus Christ.
- That is the basis of a life of faith, the core, the final answer to the last “Why” question of who we are and what we do
- This is the new life we are reborn into through Baptism, and we renew here weekly
- Now I will tell you that I do not know anyone who perfectly lives up to that standard
  - The Good Lord knows I do not
  - No one since Jesus himself as far as I can tell
  - And so our challenge from this morning I think is this:
  - After we ask why five times, after we get down to some of our core
  - Learn something about ourselves, about what motivates us.
  - Then start over with this:
  - I am a child of a loving God, and I follow Jesus Christ
  - And instead of why, say, “therefore...”
  - And say five therefore’s, building out to something that God may be calling you to do
  - Out of your true core identity
  - And when you get to that answer, then make that change in your life to better reflect the God who loves you and the Jesus who redeems you
  - And if we all did that, I dare say our nations, our families, our health, and our churches will all be better for it.

Amen.