

“WHOM DO YOU KNOW?”

1 Corinthians 2:2-12 February 9, 2020

Yesterday when I was working on today's message I came across a humorous story I thought you might enjoy. It really doesn't apply to today's message but you might get a kick out of it?!?!?

On her first visit to Texas, a woman visited a cowboy-themed nightclub. Excusing herself to freshen up, she headed to the restroom. A minute later she returned to her date and asked, “Am I a steer or a heifer?”

“What do you know?” There are all sorts of ways to ask that question. It could be a genuine search for knowledge. It could be a dismissal, or a taunt. It could be a question of incredulity, surprised by the object of the inquiry. It could be an expression of wonder. There are probably more ways we could twist around the meaning of that question!! But while that's an intriguing question to focus on, and in many ways it sounds like what Paul is dealing with in this week's Epistle text, it's not really the question in the center of the proclamation.

Wisdom is the word Paul comes back to again and again. We could throw in mystery as well. Lofty, fancy words are also present in the text that seeks to communicate truths. All of them point to knowledge at least on the surface. What do you know that you can pass on to us? That may have been the question on people's minds as they came to hear Paul when he rolled into town. What can you pass on, what can you teach, what do you know, Paul? You may be asking that of your pastor this morning?!?!?

Paul says that's the wrong question. Not that there aren't things to know. Not that there aren't words to use or stories to tell. But the premise of the question is what is giving him pause. He says he didn't come with a body of knowledge. And he did this by choice. It wasn't that he didn't know stuff. He was a Pharisee; he knew plenty. He could talk your ear off with all the stuff he knew. But he chose to set all that aside.

“I decided,” he wrote, “to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified.” For Paul, “What do you know?” is the wrong question. The better, more proper question is “Whom do you know?” This mystery of God, this wisdom that is beyond the wisdom of this age, this Spirit that is not the spirit of the age, is a who not a what.

OK, so our content is information about Jesus, right? Well, Paul would argue, no, not really. It is something much riskier than information. It is relationship. Paul says he came with fear and trembling; he came in weakness. All he had to offer was himself and the Christ who lives within. He had no argument to make, no knowledge to pass on; he just had who he is and is becoming in Christ.

Think about this for a moment. We in The United Methodist Church adhere to a mission statement that says, ‘making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.’ Sounds complicated, doesn’t it? But those who are seeking Jesus, a Savior and Companion, are not seeking information about him, are they? They are seeking a relationship with him and perhaps that begins with a relationship with you?!?!? Maybe they don’t really want to know what do you know about him but do you know Jesus? What does he mean to you and what is your relationship with him? Do you love him and does he love you back? Did he die on the cross for your sins and why would he do that?

Whom do you know? Today’s reading points out to us that our lives are a testimony of our fundamental beliefs and values and sense of meaning.

Fred Craddock shares this powerful story about a vacation encounter in the Smoky Mountains of eastern Tennessee that moved him deeply. He and his wife took supper one evening in a place called the Black Bear Inn. One side of the building was all glass, open to a magnificent mountain view. Glad to be alone, the Craddocks were a bit annoyed when an elderly man ambled over and struck up a nosey conversation: “Are you on vacation?” “Where are you from?” “What do you do?”

When he discovered that Fred taught in a seminary, the man suddenly had a preacher story to tell. “I was born back here in these mountains,” he said. “My mother was not married, and her shame fell upon me. The children at school called me horrible names. During recess I would go hide in the weeds until the bell rang,” he told Fred. “At lunchtime I took my lunch and went behind a tree to avoid them.”

“Things got worse when I went to town. Men and women would stare at my mother and me, trying to guess the identity of my father. About seventh or eighth grade, I started to go hear a preacher. He wore a clawhammer tailcoat, striped trousers and had a face that looked like it had been quarried out of the mountain. He frightened me in a way, and he attracted me in a way. His voice thundered.”

“I was afraid of what people would say to me, so I’d sneak into church just in time for the sermon, then rush out quickly when it was done. One Sunday, some women had cued up in the aisle and I couldn’t get out and I began to get cold and sweaty and was sure that somebody would challenge me, ‘What’s a boy like you doing in church?’”

“Suddenly I felt a hand on my shoulder. I looked out of the corner of my eye and saw that beard and saw that face. The minister stared at me and I thought, ‘Oh, no. Oh, no. He’d gonna guess.’”

“The minister focused a penetrating glare at me and then said, ‘Well boy, you’re a child of ah...You’re a child of ah...Ah, wait.’ The preacher paused dramatically, getting ready to announce a horrible revelation to the church. Then he said, ‘You’re a child of God!!! I see a strikin’ resemblance!’”

“He swatted me on the bottom,” said the old man, “and then told me, ‘Go claim your inheritance, boy!’”

Fred Craddock looked more closely at the old man and asked, “What’s your name?”

As the gentleman got up to wander on, he proudly replied, “Ben Hooper!” Fred remembered his own father telling him about the time when for two terms the people of Tennessee had elected an illegitimate governor named Ben Hooper. The outcast had survived. The shamed had succeeded. The boy of infamy was transformed into a man of fame and stature.

Whom do you know? Our identity is composed of being a follower of the Christ and a beloved child of God. As such we give our testimony of Jesus in our lives as we witness to His unconditional love, grace, and mercy. These truths empower us to live for Him and give him the glory.

William Carey was a pastor of a small congregation in Leicester, England. In 1792 he preached a powerful sermon called “Expect Great Things from God; Attempt Great Things for God.” People would remember it for years. His message not only moved hearts in his congregation, it also came home to challenge Pastor Carey’s own soul. The next year he set sail for India, and what he did in that country was simply astounding. He began a manufacturing plant to employ jobless workers. He translated the scriptures and set up shops to print them. He established schools for all ages, helping people find a better place in

society. He provided medical assistance for the diseased and the troubled and the ailing. He was nothing short of a miracle for the people of India.

Why did he do it? Because of the testimony that Paul makes in today's reading from 1 Corinthians. In fact, as Paul points to Jesus, and not to himself, so it was true of Carey. When he lay dying, these were his last words: "When I have gone, speak not of Carey but of Carey's Savior."

Another man who witnessed to his faith and gave his testimony about serving and witnessing to the glory of God was John Wesley. John Wesley is the founder of the Methodist faith although because of his humility he would not allow the church to pull away from the Church of England until after his death. John Wesley did not set out to form a new Church. He always maintained that Methodists were part of the Anglican Church, and encouraged his followers to take part in Anglican services and sacraments whenever possible.

However, after a failed mission to America, back in London on May 24, 1738, while attending a religious society meeting, Wesley had a deep religious experience. "I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me, that He had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and had saved *me* from the law of sin and death."

"I began to pray with all my might for those who had in a more especial manner despitefully used me and persecuted me. I then testified openly to all there what I now first felt in my heart."

With renewed faith, John (with Charles, his brother, and a friend, George Whitefield) spread the Word of God's love and salvation throughout Britain. The neglected poor and lower classes were given their first hope of salvation and their first incentive to lead better lives through Christ. Services were held anywhere—in fields, barns, abandoned buildings, even mining pits.

Today, John Wesley's life and teachings still carry a special meaning to United Methodists:

GOAL of being faithful disciples of Jesus Christ

EXAMPLE of sharing God through missions

CONCERN with social problems

BELIEF in the grace and forgiveness of God's love

OPENNESS to ecumenism-promoting or tending toward worldwide Christian unity and cooperation

The United Methodist Church is grounded in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Whom do you know? Our identity as Christians, as children of God, and as United Methodists calls us “to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” (Micah 6:8). With God’s help, let it be so. Amen.