

Trinity 11 (2024)

Coming to Christian faith requires knowledge.

Persevering in the Christian faith requires knowledge.

Sharing the Christian faith requires knowledge.

If we are already believers, we are here this morning – among other equally important reasons – to increase and confirm our knowledge.

To be reminded of those things that are of first importance . . . Christian essentials, we might call them.

Reiterating and reminding is what Paul is doing in today's Epistle. He reveals his hand as the reading opens:

**“Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand.”**

Or, as one modern translation has rendered it:

**“Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand.”**

The people Paul is writing were muddled about a great many things. Nevertheless, they seemed to have been real believers. The seed he had sown when he came through Corinth at the end of his second missionary journey had germinated and taken root.

Yet, by the time Paul wrote this letter some correction was needed. The issue Paul addresses in chapter 15 is the resurrection, Jesus’ and ours.

The Corinthians, at least initially, had accepted that Jesus had risen the third day with a body that could be handled and touched. But it is possible some were stepping away from that belief.

Further, what seems almost certain is that they had not worked out the implications of Jesus' resurrection, what it meant in terms of their future resurrection.

Paul will go on later in this chapter to address that issue: If Christ had not been raised, they would not be raised. No resurrection, no hope.

But, before he gets to his main point, he rehearses the most elementary points of the Christian Gospel . . . 'Just the facts', as it were. That's what we find Him doing in today's reading, reminding them of what he has already told them.

We too need to be reminded of the central truths of our faith. We dare not let them slip away or become cloudy in our understanding.

That is why we recite creeds . . . the Apostles' in Morning and Evening Prayer; the Nicene at Holy Communion. Both are great summary statements of 'just the facts'.

The public reading of scripture and its exposition in sermons likewise serves this purpose, as does the Lord's Supper.

That is why gathering week by week on the Lord's Day is so important.

"Seven days without God makes one w-e-a-k" read a sign out front a church.

It may be a lousy pun but there is a lot of truth in it. No wonder the writer of Hebrews urged his readers not to stay away from their meetings. **"Not forsaking the assembling of**

**ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching,”** he writes (10:25).

Being reminded of the basic truths of our faith is important for our spiritual health, no doubt about it, but it has another benefit as well. That benefit is missional.

We must know what we believe and why if we are to bear faithful and convincing witness to those outside the Church, to unbelievers, including those coming from other world religions.

Nabeel Qureshi, author of the book *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus*, came from a very devout Muslim family. At an early age, he and family moved to the United States. His mother instructed him in the particulars of the Muslim faith. By the time he got to middle school, he was a passionate apologist for Islam.

What he found astounding when he came in contact with Christians was how little they knew about their faith. This ignorance made it easy for him to plough through their arguments and make a convincing case for Mohammed, the great prophet of Islam.

In college, however, he had a roommate who not only would patiently listen to what he had to say but who had the skill and knowledge to explain what Christians actually believe and why.

And, of course, as the title of his book suggests, he eventually came to Christian faith and became a passionate apologist for it.

My point: It is important to know what we believe and why. not only for our own benefit, but for the benefit of others . . . those who are without God and without hope in the world.

Knowledge opens the door for witness, effective witness.

Repetition and reminding is therefore good and needed.

What about you?

If you were confronted with someone like Nabeel who was passionate about his non-Christian faith . . . someone who said the evidence for Christianity was flimsy . . . could you make the case for Christ? For Jesus' historicity? For the resurrection?

Paul would not have the believers in Corinth to be ignorant of such things. He wanted them to have a secure faith themselves, and beyond that, one they could share. Therefore, he begins his spiel with: "Let me remind you."

No doubt, he would desire the same for American Christians, including us at St. Luke's. So, today's passage has real relevance for us.

If someone asked you what is the Gospel, what could you tell him? Where would you begin?

Paul's summary account of Christian essentials in today's reading might serve as a guide.

Our answer might begin with saying that the God who made the heavens and the earth and who holds the stars in their courses has pulled back the curtain and revealed Himself in the person of Jesus Christ.

More than that, with the coming of Jesus all the promises found in the Hebrew scriptures have reached their great 'telos'.



Think of trains leaving different stations and at different times and then finally arriving at their appointed common destination.

That is what happened with the coming of Jesus Christ. In Him all of God's promises find their yes. This is what Paul means in today's passage when says that all that has happened has been "in accordance with the scriptures."

Let's go further. Why is a man dying on a cross and coming back to life good news for us 2000 year later?

One way of telling the biblical story is to say that humans, right from the start, rebelled against their God and Creator, tried to have it their own way. As a result, they became alienated from the One with whom they were created to share fellowship. No more walks with God in the garden.

The result has been a loneliness that needs to be satisfied, a void that needs to be filled.

People try to meet this need by acquiring more and more things, by self-medicating themselves with drugs, by busyness. /// But it doesn't work.

Put another way, we humans long for a country we have lost and have a distant memory of.

Perhaps this alienation is what is being pictured in Genesis when Adam and Eve are expelled from the Garden of Eden and the gate is closed.

The good news is that God in Christ has re-opened the fast-closed gate. He took our sin and alienation upon Himself, carried it all the way to the cross, and there somehow dealt with it once and for all, expiated it. Paradise lost has become paradise regained.

Remember what happened when Jesus cried out on the cross, “It is finished.”

At that moment, the veil, the heavy curtain which kept people out of the place of presence in the Temple – the Holy of Holies -- came down, torn from the top to the bottom, as if ripped by God Himself.

What this means is *///* **all of God’s children can come in.**

The writer of Hebrews picks upon on this theme when he says: (here he is thinking beyond Easter to Ascension):

**“Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens . . . Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”**

What's on your heart this morning? What baggage are you hauling around?

It may be regret over things that happened in the past, things done or left undone . . . the what-might-have-beens of life. Or worries over things in the present. Or fears for the future, coming what-ifs, we might call them.

Whatever it is you don't have to keep lugging that baggage around. Bring it to the throne of grace and leave it there.

The Gospel is still good news. It is for us today. "Keep telling the story. Be faithful and true. Let other see Jesus in your words and work." ///

"Let me remind you" Paul tells the Corinthians. Allow me to leave you with the same message this morning.