

The Gift of Confusion

In education there is a term referred to as cognitive dissonance. Roughly defined, it refers to a situation, event, thesis, proposal or other conditions which produce the “What?” response.

For example, either the [card trick or the spelling trick]. Teachers and others strive to create situations like this because it is so alluring, so “what?” that it engages thinking – without and debate or resistance. If strong enough, it can produce life changing impact.

The addict or alcoholic for example, who after years of struggling can seemingly in an instant be changed by an event, usually a bottom of some kind, that causes dissonance with a way of life – confusion – and ultimately, hopefully, change.

Then there are times when the “What?” seems connected to some really hard to understand event, like the Koran burning that has sparked defiance on the part of the defilers and violent protest on the part of some of those who use such acts for violent protest.

Today, as in the world of John and Jesus before him, we live in the midst of such problems. Today, as in the time of John and the teachings of Jesus, the question is the same: How do we use the teachings of the traditions we follow, the presence of God in our lives, and the courage it requires to do do – in dealing with situations.

At Jan Hus, we live in a world that brings life in all its fullness to our doorstep. Living in this world is something like that. We will serve in various ways more than 20,000 visitors to our outreach program this year.

This outreach, like others in faith-based initiatives, are all about a response to what we cannot accept, what causes us dissonance, what calls us to look deep into the vibrancy of our faith and to respond.

It is imperative that we all do this, whatever or however it is we might know God. Just know God. By nature, by dogma, by science, literature, love – even sorrow, because for me, at least – my own sense of completeness is diminished without the relationship I have to the maker of the stardust from which I came, or the dust from which Jesus healed the blind man’s sight.

John writes the narrative about Jesus in such a way as to draw the reader of his time into the story. Usually he follows something like this:

The intriguing event:	healing
Discussion about the event:	dialogue
Teaching its lesson:	discourse

In my years of teaching, it was no different. We would engage students with an initiating activity, talk about the activity which linked in some way to the objectives of the lesson, and then use the preceding to teach or “show how” it fits together.

In this morning’s story Jesus is walking down the street and sees a blind man. The tradition of the times suggested that children paid for the sins of their parents, so the fact that the person was blind would suggest to many that his parents had sinned causing him to be born with no sight.

The idea that the man himself could have sinned to create his own condition showed that at least some of those asking the question were unfamiliar with the traditions.

But Jesus turns their questioning around, directing them to look for how the glory of God can be demonstrated in this man’s predicament rather than for some cause and effect.

And to make his point, and without any request or petition from the blind man, Jesus creates a paste, places it on his eyes, and sends him to the pool to wash, whereupon his sight was restored.

And just as we might have witnessed something like this that made us go “What?” – dialogue follows.

But this dialogue has an edge to it. Doesn’t everything surrounding Jesus put the status quo on edge? Isn’t that true of any prophet, leader, or advocate for others?

Anyway, back to the Pharisees, who ever seem to be lurking about jump all over the healed man, refusing to see what God has done – instead blinded because they are seeking other than God or God-ness in others.

I don’t judge them at all, considering that I have done and will do the same – too easily forgetting the God of the moment for my own designs.

The Pharisees use the healing as another move closer to entrapping Jesus in some way, this time for violating one of the [39 categories](#) or work prohibited on the Sabbath – this one being “kneading,” in this case kneading spittle and dust.

It was serious stuff of the times, violating these laws. It messed with tradition, broke a covenant established long ago, and the Pharisees whose authority came from maintaining these laws and the covenant were, at best, threatened.

So teachers and rabbis – after the healing and dialogue comes the discourse and the conclusion and the sharpness of Jesus' tongue and wit. His words and intent would have been clear to all:

Jesus..., "I came into the world to bring everything into the clear light of day, making all the distinctions clear, so that those who have never seen will see, and those who have made a great pretense of seeing will be exposed as blind."

Some Pharisees overheard him and said, "Does that mean you're calling us blind?"

Jesus said, "If you were really blind, you would be blameless, but since you claim to see everything so well, you're accountable for every fault and failure."

The failure is not in the confusion. In fact, confusion can sometimes be seen as a gift – the gift of entering into situations which produce dissonance, pushing us to resolve or address what is causing the condition. Life it seems inexorable moves toward the ambiguity and shades of gray of God's great creation. Confusion, the difference between what we know and what we are trying to find out and how to conduct ourselves and believe in the process...expect more of this as time goes by.

The failure is in not seeing God in the event or bringing God to the event.

Rumi, the master of the Sufi tradition and mystic who lived in the 13th Century talked about this in a short piece called "Signs that Speak"

GOD WORKS IN MYSTERIOUS WAYS. Things may look good outwardly, but there may be evil contained inside. Let no one be deluded by the pride that he himself has conceived good ideas or done good deeds. If everything were as it seemed the Prophet would not have cried out with such illuminated and illuminating perspicacity " Show me things as they are ! You make things appear beautiful when in reality they are ugly. You make things appear ugly when in reality they are beautiful. Show us therefore each thing as it is lest we fall into a snare and be ever errant."

Confusion. Show us things as they really are. Let us not be deluded.

In this time of Lent, now in the 4th week, Jesus' messages and teachings take on a bit more depth. These are some of the final words he will speak in the company

of those who followed him during his ministry. John writes his gospel in such a way as to emphasize this. And, maybe, in a way to remind us all of the limited time we have to do good, do God, be faithful on this journey.

For those new to Jan Hus, you are in a place that regularly challenges the status quo and those who are held to enforce such things. Part of our ministry is to be staunchly welcoming to all in the full work and worship of this congregation and community.

I have just returned from California, where I attended the appeal hearing for The Rev. Dr. Jane Adams Sphar. Janie has been brought up on charges by an anonymous complainant in her presbytery that she violated her ordination vows and the Book of Order (our constitution) when she married 12 same gender loving couples in California during the time they were legal between June 6 and November 15, 2008.

Janie's response was that she would have violated her ordination vows by not marrying these loving couples. Instead of asking about the efficacy of such love, Janie saw the love of God in these couples and was faithful to her call, regardless of the consequences. She saw beyond the cause-effect. And still, the church courts are blinded. The appeal court upheld the lower court ruling which said that she was guilty of violating the constitution for performing a same gender loving marriage, but upheld her 35 years of faithful ministry to the LGBT community, calling on the church to change. Now on to the Court of the Presbyterian Church, the GAPJC or General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission.

It's safe from a distance...

In all areas of oppression and marginalization, whether like Janie, I and others who are out and open about being members of the LLGBT community trying to help others see God in all creation, whether like this vibrant and dedicated mission to serve those among us who have less – much less than any may serve –

Or whether it is in voice and music and the expression of the gift of your talents for others to hear and embrace – it all goes better if somehow, in whatever way we may, we find God as the great landscape of it all. For me, it is the connection that is part of who I am, part of who we all are, I believe, and if we can do that better – maybe we'll all get along better and see the needs in others too easy to ignore.

The gift of confusion, of being faithful in the mix of life, is like any fine gift. It keeps on giving. The gift of confusion is a call to justice, love, and most of all to God in every day life.

Cornell West the theologian, writer, professor says that “Justice is what Love looks like in public.” To that I would add, Justice and Love is what God looks like in our hearts and one another.

If that’s a little confusing...take it as a good sign.

Amen.