

“Keep Asking Questions”  
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John 3:1-17

About every week or so, I pick up the phone and call my brother Adam who lives near Pittsburgh, and see what he's up to, and how things are going. Inevitably, in every phone call, I ask him about his three year old son Robbie, and inquire as to what new things he's doing and saying that week. Because if you know three-year-olds, you know that they're amazing, and every week they're doing something amazing or saying something new - and Robbie is no exception.

A couple of months ago, Robbie somehow learned the words “actually” and “especially.” So when Adam or Linda asked him to do something, like, “Robbie, do you want to go upstairs and get dressed?” he would come back with, “Actually, I don't want to.” Can you imagine? A three year old!

Well, this week he's up to something entirely new. When I talked to Adam on Tuesday night, I asked the usual - “So what adorable thing has Robbie done this week?” To which Adam replied, “Wait until you hear this. Everything is questions this week.” I said, “What do you mean?” He said, “Well, we'll say, ‘Robbie, come on over to the table for dinner,’ and he'll say, ‘What will happen if I don't?’” He never answered yes or no, it's always a question. Question after question after question - never a straight answer.

Kids are absolutely amazing - their minds never stop, and they pick up things so quickly. Especially when they're really little.

Somewhere along the way that changes, though. I don't know exactly when, and I sure don't know exactly why, but somewhere along the way, we stop asking questions so much. I guess we get a little big for our britches, and the older we get the more we understand how much we know, and we get impressed with ourselves. We settle in and get comfortable.

It's a special temptation to do that when we arrive at certain points in our lives. Sometimes that happens, in terms of faith, after confirmation. Sometimes getting through confirmation is seen as sort of a graduation, and from that day forth, there is no more intentional learning, no more Sunday School, no more studying, no more asking questions.

Another dangerous point is graduation. Sometimes instead of graduating into a wider world of learning, graduation is seen as a stopping point. "I've done all the studying I intend to do, thank you very much."

Well this morning, on the Sunday after confirmation, and on the Sunday we recognized our graduates, I want to make a pitch for continuing education by encouraging all of us to "keep asking questions," and perhaps there is no better scriptural example of that than today's main character - a fellow by the name of Nicodemus.

You may remember hearing about Nicodemus before. Nicodemus was a learned man, a learned religious man. By rights, he should have known a lot of the answers to life's questions, and to be honest, most people thought he did. He was known to be a learned man in the religious community. He was held in high regard.

As a matter of fact, he felt like he'd be scorned if anyone thought he had questions. So it was, then when he screwed up his courage to go and talk to Jesus, he did it at great risk to himself and his reputation - such great risk, that he chose to go to Jesus under cover of darkness - so nobody would see him.

Hmmm - maybe that's why we stop asking questions too. Maybe we're concerned that people won't think so much of us - that we don't know everything - that maybe they'll think we're not so sure of our faith - that we have doubts.

At any rate, Nicodemus goes to Jesus at night, and he asks questions - big questions, deep questions, serious, life questions. You see, Nicodemus knew a lot of facts, but he also knew that something was missing in his life - the facts weren't enough - head knowledge wasn't enough - he needed more. So he went to Jesus to learn about it.

And lo and behold, through the conversation with Jesus, through the back and forth dialogue, the questions, the challenges, through it all - Nicodemus found the key to what was missing. We don't know what happened right after that conversation, but we do know that Nicodemus became ever more faithful, and he was one of the few there after the crucifixion and helped Joseph of Arimathea lovingly care for Jesus' body after his death on the cross.

You know, perhaps we ought to have a painting of Nicodemus in our Sunday School rooms, to remind us and inspire us. Perhaps a painting of Nicodemus and Jesus talking in the dark by the light of a candle. Just to keep ever before us the importance of always asking questions, always seeking to know more, always seeking to draw closer to God, always seeking to grow in faith.

I hope none of us ever grow content to simply be in our faith. I hope none of

us let confirmation or graduation or adulthood or degrees or offices in the church lure us into thinking we're done, that we know all we need to know. Because they're always so much more to learn, always a way to grow closer and closer to our Lord.

There are so many opportunities right here in our church. There are always classes to take part in - year long classes, short term classes, Lenten classes, summer classes. There are groups of all kinds in which to take part - Beginnings groups, Disciple groups, UMW circles, men's gatherings and breakfast meetings, youth group, and young adult gatherings.

There are great books to read, books that will cause you to think deeply about faith - check them out in our library. There are movies to watch - we've seen that over the past five weeks - movies in which to see the things of faith.

There are devotional materials of all kinds - to make you think and make you examine your life.

There are web sites, and chat rooms where you can ask questions and talk to other seekers.

And there are opportunities like the Walk to Emmaus, a whole weekend to explore the things of faith, and get answers to deep questions. If you want to hear more about that, this is your lucky day. There's a gathering at 12:15 today in Weldin Hall to talk about Emmaus, and you're invited to come, even if you haven't pre-registered.

Well, you get the idea. Keep asking questions. Keep seeking. Keep learning. There is no confirmation stopping point, there is no graduation in the life of faith - it is a constant seeking journey that leads us ever closer to Christ.

My prayer is that all of us will become like Nicodemus. Let's not rest on our laurels, or be afraid to admit what we don't know. Let us, instead, ask questions, seek, and keep on learning until the end of our days. May it be so. Amen.