

It’s a tricky question, the question “why?”

At any good motivational or business course you’ll see this concept or something like it. But, how often, I wonder, do churches ask this question - especially as we panic about membership decline, hoping to attract people with offerings of different kinds.

At the keyboard, ready, I thought, to plunge into the first reflection for 2018 this week, I found myself unable to settle. I can’t remember now what sent me to the Simon Sinex Youtube of his TED talk where he uses Apple as a successful example of communicating from the inside out (as in his diagram above) – telling people WHY they do what they do THEN “how” they achieve that and THEN and only then, “what” they produce.

This week (because I was asked!) I produced a flier to tell outsiders about St Andrew’s and an organisational chart for the Council. After Sinex’s golden circle, I looked at them with new eyes! While informative, neither flier nor chart told anything about “why” this group of people are being church here on The Terrace, or more importantly why we as individuals have a “why” within us that urges us to seek a spiritually-minded community. Nor did it in any way connect with any “why” that might be hiding within the people around this church or living in our communities.

A real “why” is a deep sense of purpose, a gut instinct, a feeling which gets you up in the morning. Why do I live breathe, eat, and work at “church”? After pondering I realise that my “why” is close to the South Korean Winter Olympics motto: “Become the Light”.

Or, it could be expressed as a deepseated desire to ***Connect to the Centre*** (referencing Keating and Bourgeault) or ***to be as fully human as I can be*** or ***Seeking the Essence of Life*** (reference to Tillich there) or ***Finding the Rhythm of Life*** (ref: Moot community,London) or to ***Truly be Here*** (Rob Bell this time) or to ***Seek Aliveness*** (Brian McLaren).

Our “why” needs to be a deep-seated and strong desire which is integral to the heart of a person. It needs to be strong enough to be connected with that which keeps them getting up in the morning. It especially needs to be a strong enough felt urge to get a person through the doors of any church; “church” in general has a huge reputation for loading us up with lots of “How” you do this and “What” you need to do, but not always answering “Why” a person might find what they are looking for here. Over the years we have confused a lot of “whats” and “hows” for our “why”

Many people tell me they come to St Andrew’s because of its social justice emphasis or the music or the theology but they are not “why” statements. They are “What” and sometimes “How” statements. The key discovery is ***Why*** are those activities important to them?

Similarly, St Andrew’s has made lots of declarations over the years – for peace, against nuclear weapons, for the gay community, against intolerance, for the living wage and advocating fair trade. We have acted to support refugees and migrants, and to support aid overseas through Christian World Service. Each Sunday we give food to DCM for their foodbank. This is ‘what’ we do and ‘how’ we do it. But, the crunch question is: ‘Why’ do we bother?

Is our “why” something like – *we desire to flourish as human beings in the most lifegiving ways described in our Christian scriptures and tradition. We desire the same for everyone, that they should have that opportunity in a just world.* Perhaps, for a better reason than winter sports, we want all people to *“Become the Light”* – so we encourage music, give generously, lobby and advocate and think theologically. All those are “how” we achieve our “why” and “what” we do to satisfy that nagging, yearning for a just world; to reach our full potential; that “why” deep inside us.

Conversely, if anything we do or how we do it doesn’t pass the “why” test, we should drop it. Never mind if it is a tradition we have done since 1840, if it doesn’t contribute to our “why” for being a faith community here on The Terrace and around the Wellington region then we are wasting our time.

I was just interrupted by a phone conversation about a wider church grouping. It’s a classic case of the “why”-we-need-to-attend-a-meeting having changed. Few have caught up with the difference. There’s more to be said about how the changes in ‘hows’ and ‘whats’ have contributed to church decline. I’ll need another blog and some reflections to get that all sorted – what a good way to start the year – it’s my ‘why’ for getting up in the morning!

Susan