

“I’ve Been Meaning to Ask...Where Are You From?”
John 1:35-51

Being curious about each other is an important part of getting to know each other. Yet, the questions we ask each other and the motivations behind them make a big difference in whether we deepen our connection or separate from each other. Our focus question for this week is: “Where Are You From?” Here is a good example of how not to do it:
<https://youtu.be/crAv5ttax2I>

There are questions that open doors and questions that close them. There are questions that help us become curious in open ways and there are questions that feed our curiosity so that we may judge or fix the other.

In our Bible story for today, we see a great example of openness to continue the conversation. One of the major themes of the Gospel of John is that of seeing, not the normal "average" way of seeing, but the deeper kind of seeing that brings life and transformation. In this passage there are at least 11 words referring to seeing. Deep seeing in John leads people to true faith. Faith is not about believing a certain doctrine or teaching. It is about one's experience of a relationship. The invitation of the disciples to follow Jesus was completely dependent on the ability of the people to see with the eyes of their hearts and to be open to a relationship. They were called "to come and see" for themselves. It involved building a relationship. The key to their following Jesus was their direct experience of seeing who he was instead of just hearing his words or about him. But this was not easy. They had to let go of their prejudices and expectation to receive something new.

Here is a video by Pastor Rasool Berry called, “Can anything good come from Nazareth?":
<https://youtu.be/ZoFy17SkIAA>.

Being in a relationship with others takes a willingness to “come and see,” meaning an openness to let the relationship flow and grow in whatever direction God guides it. Instead of putting people in boxes or even putting ourselves in a box, we are able to let the interactions change and shape us. Another temptation in relationships is to pretend and to mask our vulnerabilities so as to project a nice image of ourselves to others. In our world today, there is a growing need for understanding and for building bridges through relationships. The pandemic and the politics of our day have separated us both physically and emotionally. Even in our churches, people have struggled to engage and connect with each other. Yet, this kind of disconnection also provides us an opportunity to connect with others more deeply. Maybe the disconnect can help us to be more genuine and open when we connect with other. As you walked in today, you received a conversation card. The invitation is to engage others with these questions. We are going to take a few moments to practice this. As you are comfortable, I invite you to turn to someone you don't know and ask them your question. Then they can ask you their question. We will share for 5 minutes. The guidelines are as follows:

- Speak from the “I” - Commit to sharing only what you know to be true from your lived experience.
- Listen from the heart -Commit to compassionate listening and fostering a space where everyone can feel heard.
- Step up & step back - Be mindful that you are both speaking up and stepping back to listen.

We will end with an Affirmation of Faith from A Sanctified Art:

We believe that goodness can come from the dirt,
that faith can come from doubt,
that minds can be changed,
that justice can begin with us,
and that something good can come from Nazareth.
We believe all these things, because we believe that God is
more expansive than we have words for
showing up in the corners of our world so often
ignored and denied.
We believe that from this place of holy surprise,
God invites us forward
beckoning hope, bravery, and curiosity from each of us.
“Come and see,” God says.
We believe.
Help our unbelief.
Amen.