

Why?

“Why Christ?”

[John 4:13-14](#)

When Rev. Adam Hamilton, the lead pastor of Church of the Resurrection, was called to start a new church in the south side of the Kansas City metropolitan area in 1990, he spent a few months wrestling with these questions:

- Why do people need Christ?
- Why do people need the Church?
- Why do people need this particular church?

He sought to answer these question with conviction because he believed that, without doing so, he would not be able to inspire others and lead a church that could change the world. Rev. Hamilton asked these questions to everyone he recruited to be in partnership with him for the new church start and helped them articulate their answers.

27 years later, Church of the Resurrection is one of the most influential mainline denominational churches in America. A church that he started with only three people - his wife and two daughters - has now over 20,000 adult members and an average worship attendance of more than 11,000 people across its 4 campuses. And, I am delighted to tell you that we are connected to this mega-church for it is also a United Methodist Church!

So, as we begin a new school year with great enthusiasm, I invite you to wrestle with the same questions that Rev. Hamilton and his church did before beginning their journey: Why do people need Christ?; Why do people need the Church?; Why do people need this particular church, Campbell United Methodist Church? We will try to answer the first question today, and the other two in the following Sundays.

Now, the first question: Why Christ? Why do people need Jesus Christ?

I am sure how you answer this question will be determined largely by how you answer another question, “Who is Jesus?”

In the New Testament of the Bible, there are many stories of and about Jesus that help us understand who Jesus is, and we draw our pictures of who Jesus based on them: the promised Messiah; the Son of God; the Son of Man; the image of the invisible God; God in the flesh; the Savior who sacrificed his life for the sins of the world; the great teacher; the healer; the miracle worker; the chief corner stone; the First and the Last.

And, there are also the names Jesus with which he referred to himself in the gospel of John: the good shepherd; the gate for the sheep; the true vine; the light; the way; the Truth; the resurrection; the life; the bread of life; and the giver of eternal life.

The Apostles’ Creed , the oldest creed of the Christian church, describes Jesus this way:

“... Jesus Christ, His[God’s] only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate,

was crucified, died, and was buried;
 he descended to the dead.
 On the third day he rose again;
 he ascended into heaven,
 is seated at the right hand of the Father,
 and will come again to judge the living and the dead.”

In Matthew 16:13-15, as Jesus’ disciples are telling him what people are saying about him and who he is, Jesus asks his disciples directly, “*But, what about you? Who do you say that I am?*” To which, Simon Peter, the disciple upon whom the Church would be built, replies “*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*”

This morning, Jesus asks us the same question, “*How about you? Who do you say that I am?*” It is a question that demands a personal answer. Our response should neither be what your pastor tells you who He is, nor what the leading theologians and denominational doctrines tell you who Jesus is. Rather, it is who YOU truly believe Jesus to be in your life. I hope and pray that we might answer Jesus’ question, which comes to us today, with conviction -- in your own words, not from your head but from the fullness of your heart.

However, no matter how well we may articulate who Jesus is based on our biblical knowledge and personal experience, we cannot fully answer the first question, “*Why do people need Christ?*” unless we first address the present human condition and the collective need arising from it.

We live in a world of self-confidence and self-sufficiency. With our scientific and technological achievements, nothing seems to be impossible. We have reached the moon and are now exploring how to send humans to Mars. We have almost decoded the secrets of the human DNA. Growing human replacement organs and tissues in animals and labs is no longer a far-fetched idea from a science-fiction movie but a living reality. It’s only a matter of time before self-driving cars on the road are the norm. With improved diet and nutrition, hygiene, exercise, and ever-advancing medical care, people are living much longer than ever before.

But, are we as successful and happy as we believe ourselves to be? Despite all of our many impressive achievements and advancements, millions upon millions of people live in poverty and are starving. Despite the vast accumulated wealth in our society, hundreds and thousands of people live on the streets. Despite all of our efforts at promoting peace, we have not stopped armed conflict and war. Millions of people live in refugee camps throughout the world, displaced from their homes. The daily news is filled with stories of abuse and violence, stories of racism, homophobia, and other hate crimes, stories of the mounting consequences of climate change, natural disasters devastating our nation and also the world.

These are not pictures of true success and happiness. And no matter how hard we appear to have everything put together, we are never as fully self-confident and self sufficient as we want others to believe. No matter how hard we try to secure our lives, we are still vulnerable and our futures very much uncertain. Despite everything we have gained and enjoy, there is still a void in our lives and a longing in our hearts.

Rev. Hamilton writes in his book, Leading beyond the Walls (p. 22):

“Jesus Christ is the solution to the deepest longings of the human heart. He is the answer to the most serious problem that plague our society. When Jesus is Lord, and the Holy Spirit enters the heart of the

believer, we find the empty places filled, and the dark sides of our soul transformed. Why do people need Christ? Because without him, we will always be lost and our lives will never realize their God-given potential. He opens the door to a whole new world for us. He enriches every life he touches. He changes the world one person at a time, as his kingdom expands across the globe.”

Jesus told the Samaritan woman whom He met at the well:

“Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water I will give them will never be thirsty. The water I give will become in them a spring of water gushing up eternal life. “

What did Jesus mean by eternal life? In his book, And Their Eyes Are Opened (pp. 128-129), C.S. Song, a distinguished Asian theologian writes this:

“For Jesus, eternal life is the power to live, not merely to live for ourselves but also for others. With the enormous resources we have in our nation, in our society, and yes, in our church, we ought to be able to give many women, men, and children in many parts of the world power to live. A cup of water, a bowl of nutritious food can give them power to live. And as they regain power to live, do we not also regain the power to live?”

“For Jesus, eternal life is the power to hope. We live in a world that offers many hopes. But, we have seen many of these hopes crumble around us. Some people in this competitive world lose the power to hope... Can we also dedicate ourselves to give power of hope to those who do not have it? And, as they regain the power to hope, our power for hope will also be increased.”

“For Jesus, eternal life is the power to love, not just to love ourselves but to love others... In this world of conflicts and tensions, Jesus practices love for others, even to the extent of giving his life for others. But, it is his power of love that enables the Samaritan woman to testify about him, a Jew, and because of her testimony, many Samaritans from that city believed in him... Can we practice the power to love those who are different from us...?”

Why Christ? Why do people need Christ? People need Christ because he is the source of the living water that gushes up eternal life, giving those who encounter him with a heart of willingness the power to live, to hope, and to love. Because like the Samaritan woman, we are tired of pretending to be someone we are not, seeking to fill the void with empty things and activities which always leave us thirsty. Like her, something deep inside of us cries out to Jesus, *“Sir, give me this water!”*

Are our hearts open to seeking the true source of life, the shepherd who leads us away from the illusion of a hope rooted in our own self-sufficiency to the real, everlasting hope found in God? If our hearts desire it, Jesus will not pass us by, not without giving us a drink from the spring of living water that quenches our thirst for true substance in our lives.

Friends, in answering the question of why people need Christ, let us first see the deep longings that exist in each of us. May we be both humble and bold enough to exclaim to Jesus Christ with our whole hearts, *“Sir, Lord, give me this water!”* Let our cups be filled, overflowing unto those around us, spreading the grace, mercy, and peace that we have received from God in our acts of living for others, giving hope to others, and loving others. Thanks be to God! Amen.