

Why are we here?

What's the purpose of this popsicle stand?

In 2015, every time the vestry gathered, we began our meeting (after an opening prayer) with this question. I heard many great conversations about what folks experienced and how some lives were changed. It was all very profound stuff. This weekend, we will look at, among other things, what will be the abiding question to shape our attention and gatherings in the coming year.

Before we move onto next year, I want to offer one last reflection about last year's question: Why are we here? What is the purpose for the collection of Christians that make up the people of Holy Cross? From where I sit in the chair purchased for this office during my last sabbatical, this is what I have come to understand about our purpose.

Holy Cross is an Episcopal parish, a member of a community of more than 80 million people world wide who call themselves Anglicans. It is a university and a hospital where all people, without exception, may discover healing in Jesus Christ and learn how we might be the hands and heart of Christ to transform the world.

That's it. This is what I believe as your rector. So, what does that mean! First a little thank you. We can thank the great religion of Islam for these great institutions: hospitals and universities. With all the negative coverage Islam gets these days, we need to remind ourselves of their great contributions to our modern world too. Ok, now I will turn to universities and hospitals.

University

A university is a place of learning filled with teachers and students. It differs from primary and secondary educational institutions which are also filled with teachers and students, because the responsibility for learning falls upon the student in a university setting. I admit, many college bound students have not cottoned on to this fact, and they are still responsible.

I like this image for a Church, and especially for Anglicans, because it puts the focus on our personal responsibility for discovering what we believe and why, rather than parroting a “confession” of a denominational belief system. Unlike the Lutheran Church, among many others that have a prescribed “confession” of beliefs that members ascribe to, Anglicans follow a liturgical pattern. Our worship binds us together and shapes what we believe. This is why our book of worship is called the Book of *Common Prayer*! We can gather at the altar holding divergent views on a particular theological point and still stand (or kneel) before the altar to receive what Christ has to offer us in the sacrament.

This is way more work than ‘tell me what to believe and I will believe and do it.’ Hence, this is historically why the Anglican Communion has, on average, had smaller congregations. We simply do not attract the “you say it and I will believe it” crowd.

I also like the idea of a university settings as there are many paths one can take for our education. It is not a one size fits all classroom environment and therefore allows and encourages all of our gifts to be celebrated and encouraged.

Lastly, the idea of a university as a place of learning is to GO and take that learning and do something with it. I have a friend who is a professional student. He simply hangs out in the university learning one discipline after another so he never has to go out and risk failing at executing all he has learned. He discovered he is a GREAT student, gets all honors in everything he does, so just continues to just learn and learn. He does not want to take on the responsibility of teaching because there is a risk of failure in that too. If a teacher’s students goes out and does not succeed, there is a risk for the teacher becoming accountable for a student lack of ability because the teacher failed to teach. Just ask my daughter about her math teachers in grade school! So my friend stays a student where he is successful and safe.

Can you imagine a parallel in the church? Where Christians find it safe to talk the Christian language and share the experience safe inside the institution? I believe our task as leaders is to help the community imagine their ministry in the world—the GO part of our university education. We may be a little weak on this part of our curricula at Holy Cross and may want to look at that in the coming year.

Hospital

The gospels are filled with stories of people coming to Jesus to find healing for themselves and those they love. I know in my own life, as a teen, I walked through the large green doors of the church to find community and healing. I may not have been able to name that cognitively, and my soul was drawn irresistibly forward to a place where Jesus would set me on a path of healing and wholeness.

Paul tells Timothy in a letter that, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the foremost.” Sound familiar? I parrot Paul all the time proclaiming that at Holy Cross, I am chief sinner among us.

I believe it is important that to move toward healing and wholeness we need to recognize our brokenness. This does not mean we need to be a mess, and spew our brokenness all over the world! There are countless folks who prefer the attention they receive as broken soul rather than do the internal work, and sometime community work, and accept the healing Christ has for all of us.

It is important to remember that, like the alcoholic or other addiction illness, healing and restoration will not happen until the individual opens that door. This is why the gospel says: ‘seek and you will find and knock and the door will be opened to you.’ Our job as leaders of the church is to provide opportunities to experience and welcome in God’s healing presence. As Samuel Shoemaker, an Episcopal priest and the cleric that the founder of AA sought out for advice in creating his 12-steps, wrote in his Apologia of his Life: “The most important thing any man (sic) can do is to take hold of one of those blind, groping hands, and put is on the latch—the latch that only clicks and opens to the one man’s (sic) own touch.” Folks are lost out there in the dark and waiting for us to reach out and take their hand to show them where we have found food. This is what makes us a hospital.

Finally Luke (and Kirk to Bones in the movie Wrath of Khan) says, “Doctor, heal yourself!” (Lk 4.23) Finding our own health and wholeness in Christ is *a-priori* in leading others so that they too may find healing in Christ. This is why all clergy in the dioceses are required to take at least one quarter off CPE (Clinical Pastoral Education). Sure, clergy need to learn how to operate in a clinical setting when we find ourselves in hospitals and hospice situations. The major thrust, however, of CPE is for the cleric in training to find healing and wholeness in oneself. Only then can we provide for others. Of course, it would be impossible to run all the ministers at Holy

Cross through a CPE program, and we need to be ever vigilant to accessing where our programs and events are with inviting us into a deeper connection with the healing power of Christ in the world.

If we as a community of Holy Cross are doing these two primary tasks: running a university and hospital, I believe that not only will the numbers (ASA) increase, but the sense of call and profound ministry that we experience currently at the Women's retreat, our journey of Holy Week, and VBS will spread through out Hayward and Castro Valley. And there will be rejoicing in the heavens!