

Why?

Workshop session

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I'm guessing that most of you are familiar with TED Talks. If not, it's a global set of conferences formed to disseminate "ideas worth spreading." The idea worth spreading which I bring to our attention is a simple idea popularized by the speaker, Simon Sinek, called the Golden Circle.

This may be a review for many of you, but the Golden Circle has an outer ring, a middle ring, and an inner circle. The outer ring says "WHAT." The middle ring says "HOW." The inner ring says, "WHY." Every organization – every person – knows WHAT they do. They make computers. They play baseball. They provide health care. Some, even many, know HOW they do it.

A few, according to the speaker, know WHY. If you're operating a business, making a profit is not WHY you do it; making a profit is a result. A few know WHY, and the exceptional, memorable organizations and people know WHY. They start at the center of the circle and move from the inside out. They answer WHY first. They start with WHY.

And the speaker gives a couple of compelling examples. The now famous Wright Brothers were in pursuit of achieving powered human flight, but they were not alone. Samuel Langley wanted to be the first to fly, and he had a recipe for success.

The War Department had contributed \$50,000 to create this flying machine, so he had money. He personally had a high profile; he held a seat at Harvard and the New York Times was following his progress. He, and everyone on his team, had an education; he hired the best minds money could buy.

The Wright's had no money; they funded this project by selling their bicycle shop. They had no publicity before their success, and not a single person on their team had a college education. But the Wright's were driven by a cause, a purpose beyond themselves. The Wright's imagined changing the course of world history.

Langley wanted to be rich and famous. Langley was in pursuit of the results, not the cause. And just to prove that's true, after the Wright's took flight, after they became first, he quit. He was interested in the fame and the resulting commercial success. The Wright's were driven by a purpose. They started with WHY.

Another example. In 1963, 250,000 people showed up at the mall in Washington, DC to hear the Rev Dr.. Martin Luther King, Jr. The speaker points out that Dr. King was not the only person who had suffered in pre-civil rights America. Dr. King was not the only great orator. But Dr. King had a gift. Dr. King didn't stand up in front of 250,000 people and tell them WHAT needed to change in America. He told people what he believed. He started with WHY.

He told them what he believed – that there were two types of laws, the laws of the Higher Authority and the laws of man, and until the laws of man were consistent with the laws of God, we did not have a just society.

Dr. King started with WHY, not WHAT. He gave the “I have a dream” speech; not the “I have a plan” speech. We don’t give our lives to a 3 year plan or a 5 point plan. Dr. King gave the “I have a dream” speech. He started with WHY, with purpose, with cause. He started with what gets us up in the morning: WHY.

We all have “why” stories. Often they may seem insignificant at first glance, but if we are present to the moment we don’t miss it.

Pulitzer Prize winner, story-teller, mystic, Annie Dillard, tells a story of her experience at a small, rural Catholic church. She tells it in her book, “Teaching a Stone to Talk.” She says: “It is the second Sunday in Advent. For a year I have been attending Mass at this Catholic church. ... Today no one, least of all the organist, could find the opening hymn. Then no one knew it. Then no one could sing anyway. There was no sermon, only announcements. The priest proudly introduced the rascally acolyte who was going to light the two Advent candles. As we could all plainly see, the rascally acolyte had already lighted them.”

She says, “A high school stage play is more polished than this service we have been rehearsing since the year one. In two thousand years, we have not worked out the kinks. We positively glorify them. Week after week we witness the same miracle: that God is so mighty he can stifle his own laughter. ... Week after week Christ washes the disciples’ dirty feet, handles their very toes, and repeats, It is all right – believe it or not – to be people.”

What grace. One of our post-communion prayers starts like this (I wonder if we hear it): “Eternal God, heavenly Father, you have graciously accepted us as living members of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ ... .” Graciously accepted.

Isn't that our WHY? Grace. Mercy. Forgiveness. Love.

In the Diocese of Fort Worth we have a new micro-site called “godlovesall.info.” You can find it on our website. We have launched it with inexpensive ads, business cards, and social media, and soon hope to ratchet it up with lightpole signs downtown and billboards. The target audience is the un-churched, the de-churched, people who have been wounded by the church.

It includes videos of local people telling their experience of the Episcopal Church, including a family with adopted children who were rejected elsewhere, a woman priest, a gay couple. It is professionally done. It might make some nervous. But, the stories these people tell of their life-changing experience in the Episcopal Church is our WHY. And the team that imagined and produced this micro-site exercised leadership in testifying to our WHY.

What I do as bishop is oversee a diocese – in the Greek “bishop” means overseer. Personally, I am not wildly motivated about overseeing anything. I prefer the more missionary understanding of being in the line of apostles – those sent. (Our self-talk is important; I learned that from the Roman Catholic bishop in Lubbock, who upon retirement expressed that he saw himself as “sent” – as a missionary – more than an overseer.)

Overseeing a diocese is what I do. Rectors have things you do. Associates have things you do. Deacons and chaplains have things you do. That goes for wardens, and altar guild members, and sextons, vestry members, and executive assistants, and those who make mission trips, and those who build Habitat houses, and treasurers. We all have things we do.

But, if we are honest, it's the WHY that sustains us when we are grinding it out in our necessary and sometimes difficult work; it's the WHY which moves us to offer ourselves sacrificially. It's the purpose, the cause. It's what we believe – what we give our hearts to.

I believe in the power of the Gospel – the power of the Good News of God's grace as revealed in Jesus – to raise the dead to new life. Making known the Gospel is what we do. The stories, the testimonies, are why we do it.

I know you believe that, too. You have given your hearts to it. In this next phase in the life of this diocese we will do much. It won't all be easy. Let's not forget why we are doing it.