

The Power of Passing It On

Psalm 66:1-20
John 21:15-25

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Faith Community

A salesperson was getting a haircut and mentioned to his barber that he was about to leave on a business trip to Rome.

“Rome is a terribly overrated city,” commented his barber, who was born in the northern part of that country. “What airline are you taking?”

He told him, and the barber said, “What a terrible airline! Their seats are cramped, their food is bad, and their planes are always late. What hotel will you be staying at?”

He named the hotel, and the barber responded, “Why would you stay there? It’s in the worst part of town and has horrible service. You’d be better off staying home!”

“But I hope to close a big deal while I’m there,” the salesperson replied. “And afterward I hope to see the pope.”

“You’ll be disappointed trying to do business in Italy,” said the barber. “And don’t count on seeing the pope. He only grants audiences to very important people.”

Three weeks later the salesperson returned to the barber shop. “And how was your trip?” asked the barber.

“Wonderful!” replied the salesperson. “The flight was perfect, the service at the hotel was excellent, and I made a big sale. And” - he paused for effect - “I got to meet the pope.”

“You got to meet the pope?” Finally, the barber was impressed. “Tell me what happened.”

“Well, when I approached him, I bent down and kissed his ring.”

“No kidding! And what did he say?”

“He looked down at my head and said, ‘My son, where did you ever get such a lousy haircut?’”¹

¹ John Maxwell, Leadership Gold: Lessons Learned from a Lifetime of Leading (Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 2008) p. 33.

Do you know any church folk like that barber? They may hold fast to a faith tradition that's filled with hope, but you couldn't prove it by them. They can be faithful attenders, in classes and groups, and may even have held positions of leadership over the years, but there's still something missing. Do you know anyone like that? They may come across as,

- Narrow minded
- Harsh
- Cold
- Judgmental

Some observers will tell you that there's precious little difference between your average church goer and everyone else. Really? Could that be said of us?

Instead of that, do you know any church folk who remind you more of the salesperson in that story? They're not flashy or intimidating, but just knowing them is an inspiration all its own. Do you know anyone whose faith is genuine, warm and encouraging? You find yourself paying special attention around them, not because of what they say, but rather you just like being around them. There's a spirit of

- Joy
- Generosity
- Warmth
- Openness

Today's topic is, "The Power of Passing It On."

In our New Testament reading the risen Christ appears to the apostle Peter, the one who had previously denied even knowing him. Jesus nails him with a deeply personal question:

Simon, son of John, do you love me? (John 21:16, TNIV)

It's the most important question he'll ever be asked. And it happens three times. And each time he answers in the affirmative, Jesus fires back with a command that basically says, "Then live your life in a way that demonstrates it to everyone around you." Learn the power of passing it on, Peter.

Peter had made more than his share of mistakes, and he'd make a few more before all was said and done. But

God looks at the heart, you see. And God saw that Peter's heart beat with a passion that placed Jesus above and beyond all others, and he'd pay the price of discipleship because of the price Jesus had paid for him.

Peter would learn the power of passing it on. Sometimes it's a spectacular thing, and sometimes it's otherwise, even simple.

Tony Campolo tells a wonderful story of the time when he was,

“....on the same speaking docket as Nobel Prize winner Bishop Desmond Tutu. Before the service began, I was carrying on the small talk that people use to fill the time. Jokingly, I asked the bishop why he wasn't a Baptist....In a moving story, the bishop explained why he had become an Anglican priest.

“He told me that in the days of apartheid, when a black person met a white person on the sidewalk, the black person was expected to step off the pavement into the gutter to allow the white person to pass, giving the white person this gesture of respect. ‘One day,’ the bishop told me, ‘when I was just a little boy, my mother and I were walking down the street when a tall white man, dressed in a black suit, came toward us. Before my mother and I could step off the sidewalk, as was expected of us, this man stepped off the sidewalk and, as my mother and I passed, tipped his hat in a gesture of respect to her!’

“The bishop said, ‘I was more than surprised at what had happened, and I asked my mother, ‘Why did that white man do that?’ My mother explained, ‘He's an Anglican priest. He's a man of God, that's why he did it.’

“‘When she told me that he was an Anglican priest,’ said Bishop Tutu, ‘I decided there and then that I wanted to be an Anglican priest too. And what is more, I wanted to be a man of God.’”²

The point here, friends, is that the power of passing it on becomes intuitive and natural. It's a way of life that points people to Jesus, and you may not even know it's happening.

² Tony Campolo, Let Me Tell You a Story: Life Lessons from Unexpected Places and Unlikely People (Nashville, Word Publishing, 2000) pp. 160-1

There are thirty-five different miracles recoded in the four Gospels. Of those thirty-five, John chose seven to be included in his. And he did so for a reason. A few weeks ago we looked at that reason:

Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:30-31, TNIV)

Today we look at the end result. What difference does it all make?

Come and listen, all you who fear God; let me tell you what he has done for me. (Psalm 66:16, TNIV)

This is something personal. You make it your own. You tell your story. It isn't a speech. There's nothing polished or professional. It is, however, genuine. And honest. And engaging.

How is your life different precisely because you're a Christ follower? We hear words and expressions like sharing your faith, or that dreaded word "evangelism." We get terrified at the thought that such a thing might apply to us because we *do* think we have to come up with some kind of speech that makes everyone uneasy when in reality it might be something as simple as tipping your hat or holding a door for someone.

There's an authenticity that goes much deeper than rehearsed lines and points of view, and it starts in the deepest part of each one of us. John himself gives us a glimpse into his own heart when he finishes up his Gospel in a way that's so touching and so revealing:

Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written. (John 20:25)

So many opportunities, friends. It's the power of passing it on.