



Sermon Transcript

Mark 1:4-11 and Acts 18:18-28 | January 14, 2024 | Second Sunday of Epiphany | Pastor John Klawiter, preaching

Grace and peace to you my friends in Christ,

Organizational psychologist Adam Grant wrote a book called “Think Again.”

It’s not about church. Or theology. Or Jesus.

But, as I’m reading it, I can’t help but apply many of his principles to the way the church could benefit from thinking again.

This isn’t about throwing away tradition. It’s not about coming up with the latest fad to attract a new market.

One of my favorite lines in Adam Grant’s book is **“the purpose of learning isn’t to affirm our beliefs; its to evolve our beliefs” ~Adam Grant, *Think Again***

What would happen if our learning about God EVOLVED our belief?!

One of the sergeants in the Army asked me a question at drill last weekend. He said, “chaplain, are you worried that as more people learn that there’s extraterrestrial life and UFO’s that this will cause them to question their faith?”

I wasn’t sure what he was getting at, but I didn’t think this was a “gotcha” question. So I said I didn’t think so. It could for some people—some people would just keep denying even if there was concrete proof. But then I told him that I would hope that this expands our understanding—that we would see how much infinitely bigger God is than anything we can imagine.

He said, “yeah, I think that too.” Phew.

I think he was also curious what methods I would use to answer his question.

Grant talks about the three modes that we enter when it comes to our conversations with others. Our minds begin to process how we’ll respond while the other person is talking.

“We go into preacher mode when our sacred beliefs are in jeopardy: we deliver sermons to protect and promote our ideals. (preacher)

“We enter prosecutor mode when we recognize flaws in other people’s reasoning: we marshal arguments to prove them wrong and win our case. (prosecutor)

“We shift into politician mode when we’re seeking to win over an audience: we campaign and lobby for the approval of our constituents. (Zelensky)

(QUOTE): “The risk is we become so wrapped up in preaching that we’re right, prosecuting others who are wrong, and politicking for support that we don’t bother to rethink our own views.”

What’s the alternative?

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Grant suggests scientific mode—to make decisions with a critical lens and when our hypotheses aren't supported, then it's to rethink how we do things.

If you don't think this has ever happened in the church, let me tell you a story about a character from our readings today.

He has a big role in helping promote the faith. He's an influential evangelist known for baptizing others.

I'm not talking about John the Baptist. I'm not talking about Jesus. And I'm not even talking about Paul.

I'm talking about Apollos. Who??? Who is Apollos and was he ACTUALLY in the story?

Sort of.

19 While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul passed through the interior regions and came to Ephesus, where he found some disciples.

Where is Apollos? In Corinth. Paul goes to Ephesus and meets some disciples. Who is the pastor to those disciples?

Apollos. These Christians only know what Apollos has taught them about Jesus.

What happens when Paul encounters these disciples?

He immediately notices that they aren't practicing their faith with the full amount of information.

Apollos has been baptizing new converts with John's baptism. What is John's baptism?

Near as we can tell, it's a baptism or ritual of repentance—being made clean before God.

Paul tells them about the Holy Spirit—information that they clearly had not heard about. How is a baptism of the Holy Spirit different? Compared to John's baptism, we could conclude that the baptism with the Holy Spirit washes over them with grace and forgiveness—they have not just been made clean, but through Christ's death and resurrection, they receive eternal life—they have salvation.

This is a big difference not to have.

How does Paul know that he needs to come and straighten things out in Ephesus?

Two of Paul's followers, Priscilla and Aquilla have heard Apollos preach.

Scout back a few verses into the previous chapter, and you'll see how that plays out.

(SLIDE of Map) Apollos is a missionary. He's from Africa and he has come to Ephesus to lead this community.

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(SLIDE of Acts 18) Then what do we learn? He was instructed in the Way—this is what the earliest disciples called themselves. Before “Christians”, they were “the Way”, you know, like John 14 “the Way, the Truth and the Life.”

He had enthusiasm and taught about Jesus. He boldly spoke in the synagogue and that’s when Priscilla and Aquilla realize that he only knows about the baptism of John... and not about the Holy Spirit and Jesus.

So they pull him out and tell him.

What does Apollos do? Does he go into preacher mode and protect what he knows—don’t you dare try and correct me!

Or prosecutor mode? You can’t be right, and why wouldn’t Paul tell me himself? Women aren’t allowed to preach in the synagogue, so why should your testimony be believed?

Or does he go to politician mode? Agreeing with them to their face and thanking them as a show of solidarity, but then return to teaching what he knows as the Gospel without including this new information.

Nope.

Apollos listens. Then he asks to be further trained—send me over to Greece where another group of disciples is gathered that can teach me more.

Paul enters Ephesus to fill the gap of Apollos preaching and to correct what he has been teaching his congregation. Those who hear the full story are baptized by Paul with the Holy Spirit.

(Pic of Apollos) This could not have happened if Apollos wasn’t willing to re-think what he knows. Apollos evolves his belief.

I don’t read the Bible the same way that I did when I was 5 or 6 years old. I certainly have a more fully developed theology of Jesus than I did as a 14 year old confirmation student. I have had experiences where I have witnessed the Holy Spirit at work in my life since my 20’s.

Nothing about my faith has stayed the same—I am continuing to learn and grow. I am constantly thrilled when I discover something that helps me evolve in my beliefs.

Learning more about God has only deepened my love and trust in God.

As we talked about with the kids, baptism is about belonging. Not to be indoctrinated in the right “way”—but to become part of a community that walks alongside of us through all of life’s weird challenges and quirky outcomes.

Grant writes that people are resistant to change. When they are, reinforce what stays the same. **(QUOTE) “Visions for change are more compelling when they include visions of continuity. Although our strategy might evolve, our identity will endure.”**



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As the Way evolved into Christianity, the identity—found firmly in the grace and love of Christ, was the lasting legacy. For Apollos, the community of believers didn't throw everything away when they learned about the baptism of Jesus—they grew stronger. They embraced the new teaching.

We are the Church in 2024. We continue to evolve. We continue to support those who seek belonging. Our identity will endure.

Why? Because we believe and trust that the Holy Spirit is fully present in our lives and in the life of this church.

Could this attitude of re-thinking change your life? It sure could. It could help each of us intentionally listen and be open to new learning from each other, especially from those with different backgrounds and viewpoints than our own.

Me might learn about confident humility—getting beyond ignorance so we can grow and evolve—but I'm getting ahead of myself. More on that... next week. I'll probably be in preacher mode sharing about the transformational presence of Christ that inspires others to follow him. Amen.