

“Why Do You Believe What You Believe?”

John 18:28-40

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I want to tell you about my former neighbor and friend, Jim Ramsey. Jackie and I lived next door to Jim and his wife, Mary, for almost seventeen years prior to moving to Atlanta. Jim and Mary were wonderful neighbors. We were saddened to hear of Jim's death last year.

Jim knew who I was even before I moved to his town because he was the president of Mutual Federal Savings and Loan where I secured a loan for my house. He was also a member of the church I was going to pastor.

As soon as I moved next door to Jim, he came to my door. “I want to show you my shed,” he said. We walked to the back of his yard and he took me inside this shed. Inside was every tool and garden implement imaginable. It truly was a Home Depot.

Then he told me that I could borrow a tool anytime I needed one. “Just come and get it,” he said, “and bring it back when you are finished.” You do not need to ask me to borrow anything. The door is never locked, so come on in.”

You could probably count the Saturdays on one hand that I did not go to Jim's shed. I went for two reasons. He had tools I did not have and he had better tools than those I did have. His were sturdy, industrial tools, the kind a serious repairman or gardener would have. Mine had the word, “Ronco” stamped on them. That ought to tell you something.

Borrowing from others is common, isn't it? We borrow everything from a cup of sugar to a ladder. Everywhere I live, I tell my neighbors if I have anything they need, ask for it. I'm not sure people believe preachers have rakes, shovels and wrenches, though. At least they know we don't have the heavy-duty kind.

Perhaps what people borrow from preachers is faith. **Faith can be borrowed, you know.** As a matter of fact, I think most people begin their spiritual journey with a borrowed faith that may or may not become their own. Let me explain.

After the religious leaders accused Jesus of blasphemy in a trial before the high priest, Caiaphas, they took him to Pilate, the Roman governor. Since the Jews had no authority to execute anyone, they had to appeal to a Roman official to crucify Jesus. I think Pilate knew that Jesus was innocent and did not deserve to die, but each time he tried to avoid a decision about Jesus' fate, the Jews put pressure on him.

In the process, Pilate interrogated Jesus and asked him if he was the king of the Jews. Jesus' reply fascinates me, for he said, **“Is that your own idea or did others talk to you about me?”**

While the story continues with Pilate finally giving the Jews permission to crucify Jesus, I want us to pause and focus our attention this morning upon the question Jesus asked Pilate. “Is that your own idea,” Jesus said to Pilate, “or did others talk to you about me?”

Why do you believe what you believe? Last Sunday I told you what I believe about Jesus. I did so in response to the question the high priest, Caiaphas, asked the

Sanhedran. In Matthew 26:66, Caiaphas said he believed that Jesus was guilty of blasphemy and asked the religious leaders, "What do you think?"

What do you think about Jesus? I encouraged you to determine what you believe about Jesus and share it with others. I told you that I believe he was the fullest and finest revelation of God, a master teacher, the great physician and the blessed redeemer.

Let's continue that line of thought this Sunday by asking a follow up question. Why do you believe what you believe?

After observing people as a pastor for thirty-two years and examining my own pilgrimage, I have a theory about people and faith. I believe there are two kinds of faith, a borrowed faith and a personal faith. I think most of us begin our spiritual journey with a borrowed faith. I did and expressed it as a nine-year-old boy through baptism and church membership. I borrowed my faith from my parents, Sunday School teachers, pastors and even public school teachers. I believed that Jesus was Lord because they believed that Jesus was Lord.

At some point in our lives, that borrowed faith needs to become personal. It needs to become our own. It needs to be written by our hand not another's. It needs to be put in our words not someone else's.

Why? Because I don't think a borrowed faith will take you very far. I certainly don't believe it will take you over the rough roads that life will put in front of you. To travel down those roads, you must have an all terrain faith. You need a faith that works when you need it and provides wisdom, guidance, courage, confidence, comfort, forgiveness, patience and hope.

How do you move from a borrowed faith to a personal faith? I would like to think that it could occur through studying scripture, reading about others' discoveries, dialoguing with believers and unbelievers and praying for enlightenment. And I believe it can.

However, I am not sure the process will be fully realized, much less completed, until you encounter a problem or challenge that is insurmountable and you have nothing but your faith to see you through. For some, this is the beginning of the process and for others this is the turning point. For sure, though, a crisis will reveal whether you have a borrowed faith or a personal faith and will either lead you to embrace what you have and hold on to it or walk away from it in disgust. Your faith will either become personal or useless.

When did that occur in my life? I have already said that I began my pilgrimage with a borrowed faith. Did it ever become personal and if so, when?

I would answer that in two ways. It has become personal and it is becoming personal. Constructing a personal faith is a process. I began that process at eighteen years of age when I felt God calling me into ministry. It continued in the seminary when I learned things about God and the Bible I had never heard and had to decide what to do with them. My faith took a giant leap toward becoming mine the morning I got the call that my dad died suddenly of a heart attack. I found out real quickly whether it was going to work or not. My faith became more defined that cold January morning I turned my first born over to a Marine recruiter. That day, I came face to face with my own limitations and learned the difference between letting a son go and turning him over to his other Father.

I could go on and tell you more experiences that have molded and shaped my personal faith, but I think you get the point. Building a personal faith is an on-going process that is shaped by the experiences and people you encounter. Let God use them to teach you about life.

Does my personal faith look very different from my borrowed one? In some ways. My personal faith has more grace in it than my borrowed faith. It has less magic. It has more questions and fewer answers. That's because my borrowed faith had a lot of answers that really did not work.

My personal faith is much more relationship oriented and less concerned with rules; not that rules are bad, but people are more important. My personal faith listens to God more than it talks to Him because it doesn't have the need to tell Him how to do His job.

My personal faith allows me to relax and be natural more than my borrowed faith did because it believes that God loves me for who I am not what I am or what I do. On the other hand, my faith drives me to become a better person, not so God will love me but because God loves me.

My personal faith doesn't feel the need to judge others or tell them how to live their lives but rather encourages them to develop, forge and pursue their own relationship with God. This personal faith doesn't need a creed either, nor does it trust denominational leaders who don't recognize one.

My personal faith better understands Paul's advice in Philippians 2:12, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." That's what I am trying to do and I hope you are, too. I assure you of this. A personal faith is much more filling and fulfilling than a borrowed one. It may not be as neatly packaged or identical to the faith of your mentors or spiritual siblings, but so rewarding will it be that you will develop an insatiable desire to know more. You will hunger and thirst after righteousness with a voracious appetite.

So, how would you answer Jesus' question of Pilate? Is that your own idea or did others talk to you about me?" Where are you in your pilgrimage? Are you still going to your neighbor's shed to borrow your faith or are you constructing your own? What will you do when that shed and your neighbor are no longer there? Think about it.