

John 1:1-14
Genesis 1:1-5, 26-7

Ignoring the FAQ's

With Christmas day and gift giving so much in our recent past, no doubt many of us in this room gave or received gifts with instruction manuals. These electronic wonders come with a lot of documentation. Sometimes it's on line. Sometimes it still comes in written form. I am wondering how many of us actually take the time to sit down and read the manual. I wonder how many of us at the end of a busy holiday season even have an interest in reading a manual. I think manufacturers are aware of our cultural propensity for skipping handbooks and they have created special pages for us called Frequently Asked Questions. The FAQ page is usually brief - maybe ten questions so we can skip the boiler plate and get to the heart of the matter. Of course many of the latest, games, gadgets, cell phones Ipods, cubes and consoles are supposedly "intuitive," so many people not only skip the manuals; but they ignore the FAQ's as well. Americans today are buying the most sophisticated computers, the coolest digital cameras, the sharpest video game systems, the snazziest automobiles, the most versatile cell phones, and then we

forget, decline or simply refuse to read the directions. I wonder what we are sacrificing by skipping the manual.

New Year's Day is simply another flip of the desk calendar, just a numeral on our digital timers and recorders and yet that change of the digit, for many people, leads to a sense of self evaluation. Although this week is really no different from last, the change from 09 to 10 somehow inspires aspirations and awakens yearnings for fresh starts. January is a time of resolution and resolutions. Since we in the church, are in the season of the birth of the Christ Child, we are even more predisposed to discover a little hope at this time of the year. The newness of the Word made flesh reminds us that God created us in God's image and that in Christ Jesus, God gave us the power to become children of God. What are some of the FAQ's of faith? Living with hope, what are some of the frequently asked questions of faith that bubble up at this time of the year?

- How can I make a fresh start? How can I strengthen my faith? How can I live out my faith in my relationships? What's the point of the day-to-day grind I'm experiencing? How can I make the best use of the time and money and talents that I have? How can I help change the world? How can I feel closer to God?

These are the FAQ's in January season. These are often the questions we ask as the church calendar changes from Christmas to Epiphany. They make for a great January 3 discussion; but the larger issue is whether any of these questions will be on our minds by January 17?

The interesting thing about faith is that like all the cool new creations of the 21st century, faith comes with an instruction manual. The hard thing about faith is that the FAQ's are different for each person and therefore the answers do come by check list. In fact since faith is a journey and we find our selves in different places at different times what we discover is that we have to stay fresh, we have to stay in dialogue, we have to stay in conversation with God and with fellow disciples.

Faith comes with an instruction manual? It might seem natural to assume that since we are sitting in church and since every Sunday we sit in church we read the Bible; that the Bible is the instruction manual. Ironically this is not true. The Bible is not the instruction manual for faith. If the Bible were our instruction manual then the passage of scripture which we read from the Gospel of John this morning would have been written like this:

In the beginning was the Bible, and the Bible was with God in the Beginning. All things came into being through the Bible and not one thing came into being except through the Bible. What has come into being in the Bible was life and the life was the light of all people. The Bible shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.

This is a subtle distinction but it is one that is central to the Reformed Tradition of Christianity. Jesus is the instruction manual not the Bible. Jesus is the Logos. Jesus is the Word. Jesus is the light that was in the beginning with God. This Word, this second person of the Trinity is who and what shines in the darkness. God poured God's own self into human form and the darkness has never overcome Jesus the WORD.

Jesus' teachings are our way. Jesus' example is our manual. Jesus' love for the outcast the outsider and the outlier; Jesus love for all people is our manual. Jesus permeating our church through the gifts of the sacraments is our handbook. Jesus' zeal for inclusion of all people is our Guidebook. Jesus' vision for justice in our world is our model. Jesus' passion for prayer and worship is our paradigm.

Meeting Jesus in mission, worship and prayer is our manual. Jesus living in our hearts is our path.

Everything that is in the Bible must be understood through the True Light that came into the world. If something in the Bible seems perplexing or confusing then we shine the lamp of the True Light on it. The Bible is obviously important to our faith, but we do not have a living relationship with the Bible, we have a relationship with God and God is revealed to us through Jesus. The Bible is a beacon not a being while Jesus is a being who is a beacon to God and faith. The revelation continues through our relationship with the Light that shines in the darkness.

When we understand Jesus as the living WORD of God; it gives us the freedom to explore the written word of God without falling into the twin traps of fundamentalism and relativism. We do not worship the words of scripture for words are symbols of our relationship with God and summaries of relationships before ours. We do not dismiss the words of scripture as being archaic references subject to manipulation; because they are symbols inspired by the Holy Spirit that point to The WORD Jesus and to the Holy. Being in relationship with Jesus the light gives me the lamp I need to help me

answer the FAQ's of faith; which brings me back to the power of resolution and resolutions.

We can only make fresh starts and stronger faith, we can only find meaning in the grind, we can only answer the call, we can only make the best of our time, talents and treasures, we can only feel and get closer to God if we change our patterns and habits. Don't hold me too tight to the words here but faith is miraculous more than it is magical. Our fairy godmother is not going to sprinkle enchanted faith dust on us as a result of one simple prayer or one lone longing and abracadabra we will have a fabulous faith. Faith as journey is a way of life. Faith is an ethic we take to work. Faith is a love with which we treat our children and parents. Faith is a patience by which we tolerate that pain in the neck child of God neighbor of ours, who means no harm but drives us crazy. Faith is a commission to create God's kingdom now. Faith is a mission by which we transform the world.

Faith takes practice. Faith takes resolution of spirit and will. Faith takes resolutions and follow through to change our hearts. If we want more faith then we need to alter our patterns. If we want to feel

closer to God and have stronger relationships in our lives then we need to answer God's call and correct our comporment.

Psychologists and masters of self improvement will tell you, that if you want to make changes in your life, if you want to give up a habit or cultivate a new one it will take anywhere from six to ten weeks to make it stick. One website recommended by Time Magazine, Psychcentral.com states that it takes 66 days to form a new habit.¹ If we are trying to get into the habit of praying daily like Jesus did, it might take us sixty days. If we want to develop the discipline of reading scripture everyday then if we start today we should be good by March 10. If want to worship regularly this year, we should attend every Sunday and Taize until Easter. If we want to cultivate generosity in our hearts as Jesus calls us to, then we need to give of ourselves and our pocketbooks regularly. If we want to grow our faith, we should be reading a book or starting a small group. We have three small groups beginning this month.

Yah, yah its fine I theory, we sometimes think; but faith is a challenge, especially when life throws up those inevitable laser quick curve balls and dazing dark potholes. The good thing about faith is

¹ <http://psychcentral.com/blog/archives/2009/10/07/need-to-form-a-new-habit-66-days/>

that like an iPod, Gameboy Advance or Droid phone, faith is intuitive. God our amazing master and creator hardwired us for faith right from the start. We have a natural longing for God that is part of the way that God made us; for each of us male and female, are created in God's image. Here is one of those places where literalism breaks down your potential for understanding. Created in God's image is not about our physical likeness to the Being that formed us through the WORD. Created in God's image means our soul circuitry is ready for God's Spirit. Our internal motherboard is molded to meld with God our loving parent. God gave us the power to become children of God right from the WORD go.

Faith is intuitive but like anything we undertake, commitment and discipline enhance our experience. Discipline is at the root of the word disciple. Children of God are those that receive Jesus; those who believe in his name.

The Book of Confessions of the PCUSA has a question and answer confession known as the Larger Catechism. The first question of the Catechism is – What is the chief and highest end of humanity? The Chief and highest end of humanity is to glorify God and fully enjoy him forever. We can get by without consulting the

manual because faith is intuitive but our capacity for enjoying God increases when we are in dynamic relationship with Jesus The WORD made flesh.