

Sermon by Erica Jeglum, on her last Sunday as our Youth Minister, June 19, 2011.

When our first daughter, Margaret was born, we were in awe. As new parents we dutifully attended her well-baby appointments in her first few days of her life. Our family doctor, who attended her birth must have seen the glazed, sleepy, and totally overjoyed look of new parents many times, but he didn't show it.

As the doctor examined her, He said, "It is amazing, isn't it?" Of course, I was thrilled to talk about the overwhelming experience of becoming a parent with anyone that was interested.

I said, "I know it is a cliché, but it really is a miracle. But, I think the stork theory is more plausible." He looked at Brian and I, a bit confused, and smiled. The moment passed, and we then went on to discussing the exciting stages of development in a newborn.

What I meant to say, of course, was that it is totally unbelievable that this baby grew inside of me. The fact that this child begin life as two separate cells, was nurtured in my body, and was born, and is now our total responsibility is beyond logical comprehension. On the other hand, the idea that a big white bird drops off a cute fat baby to adorable, freshly showered, and totally worthy parents is much more believable than the scientific truth that involves an uncomfortable pregnancy, a messy birth, and the undeniable fact that all parents must realize in those first few days: there is no manual for parenting.

Similarly, Christianity makes no sense. Really, it doesn't. Let's review our Christian story: God *spoke* the world into existence out of nothing, created everything, destroyed it, selected a small race of people to be chosen, sent messages for hundreds of years through Kings and Pharaohs, young boys and old women, fire, famine, and then God finally decided that a more direct approach to humanity was needed. So, the Creator of the Universe decides to become human, be born by a young unimportant girl, probably no older than 14 years old, and to live among his creation for a few decades before he begins to reveal his divine ministry.

Then, in over the course of about 3 years, which is a millisecond in the history of the created universe, Jesus tells us that we are called to live and act in love, all because God the Father loves us. And, as we all know, because God loves us so very much, and he allows himself to be found guilty of a bogus crime, to be crucified, so that we are no longer separated from him by death because of our sin. And then, miraculously, three days later, Jesus emerges from the tomb and starts chatting with his old crowd. **REALLY?** Stop and think about it. This makes no sense! Why would the God of all creation, care about our sin? Wrongdoing which is wholly our responsibility, to which we should be held accountable for. Murderers, rapists, child abusers, all of them are forgiven and loved by God, along with you and me, regular everyday people with regular everyday sins. How can this make sense? It cannot possibly be real because everything we know from such a young age is based on reward and punishment, not grace and forgiveness. Even my 2 year old knows that time out on the stairs is bad and stickers are for good behavior.

But our society doesn't teach grace and forgiveness.

If we are honest with ourselves, we will admit that we have doubts as to the whole story. On my best faith days, I can say that my doubts don't bother me. On days that are more common than I would like to admit, I wonder if it is really true because this story of Christianity, the story of God's love for his people, goes against all human logic.

And then, If I cannot possibly explain away all these logical questions.... If I can't answer my own doubts, then how could I ever adequately share my faith? It is no wonder that so many Christians are deathly afraid of the word Evangelism.

Evangelism--- you can say the word and feel the room hush. EVANGELISM--- oohhhh. (Like the scene in the Lion King where the hyenas are scaring themselves with the name of the King of Loins: Mufasa. Mufasa. Evangelism....) I think that we would prefer to hear a sermon in tithing several times over before we want to hear one on spreading the faith, sharing the good news, EVANGELISM.

This morning's Gospels reading, is commonly referred to as the Great Commission, One Jesus' most famous teachings. Jesus said, "GO, MAKE DISCIPLES, BAPTIZE THEM." In essence he said, tell them about me, about our story, about how I have challenged your life.

If we ever engage in any sort of Evangelism, it isn't long before we are hit with a series of logical questions: How did God create something out of nothing? What about the dinosaurs? Where is the evidence of the Great Flood? And then there are the really complex, philosophical questions: If Jesus was really God, why did he have to allow himself to be killed? Why does the Bible talk about Hell? The Trinity, for real? I mean, how can God be three people at once and just be one God? If God really loves us, like you say, then why do good things happen to bad people – and the worst things to the best people? Why did my parents get divorced, why did he get cancer, why did I lose my job? why, why why?

Theologians from the beginning of time to our day have tried addressing these questions. There is a whole genre of Christian theology dedicated to explaining the logic of Christianity. It's called apologetics. Our Christian friends that are more conservative on the Christian spectrum will often school their children in order to have answers at the ready to these questions. Similarly, a good youth minister has thoroughly researched and prepared answers to these doubts: I can say, "The trinity is like water: it can be present in three forms but is still H₂O." Or, either "Jesus is a lunatic or everything he says is true." Or, perhaps the easiest of the apologetics: "why not? What do you have to lose?"

We could rattle off many more apologetic responses, but the truth is that all of these answers come up short. The disciples knew this, because as they were sitting there, listening to Jesus give his final instructions, *SOME DOUBTED*. Did you hear that in the reading? Some of these wonderful, faith filled disciples. Men that have churches, and cities named after them – men and certainly women as well, these are people that Jesus specifically called on, and some of them DOUBTED.

Our faith doesn't make sense. It is entirely illogical. We can't explain it. We have some doubts. And that, Sisters and Brothers, is what makes Christianity so very, very special.

We are fully members of Christ's one Church with our doubts. We do not have to have every question answered – the disciples didn't – and we don't have to make any apologies for the amazing story of God's love for us. Jesus never said that we had to have it all figured out. He said, "Love one another as I have loved you... blessed are those that have not seen and yet believe... clothe the naked, feed the sick.... share your blessings..... don't worry about tomorrow.....tell your friends about me." When we share what Jesus said, we can share our doubts... and at the same time, share all the blessings that God has given us. We can have faith despite having doubts. We can share the story – agree with all the illogic of the Bible and our story, and at the same time state the wonder that is Christ's presence in our lives.

You see, whether I understand the miracle that is becoming a parent, or I understand the awesome that is God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, I have a responsibility. I may doubt my parenting: whether my children really must drink milk with every meal, or I may lay awake at night wondering about what challenges they will encounter as teenagers and my ability to handle them. But, I still have a calling to be the very best mother I can be to my children.

And just the same, Jesus said to his friends, some of whom were doubting, go – share my story, invite others in, make them part of this amazing loving community. Those of us that have more questions than answers are still worthy of being called followers of Christ, and therefore, we have the humbling responsibility of sharing that experience. My fellow believers and doubters: Go, share the story, make disciples, and baptize them into our community of faith.