



First Mennonite Church

Midweek E-Newsletter

March 15, 2023

From Pastor Tom

Stages of Faith

One of the most helpful books I ever read is [called] *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, by James Fowler. The book grew out of conversations with around 400 people of all ages, from four to eighty-eight, including Jews, Catholics, Protestants, agnostics, and atheists. Its central premise is that the human quest for meaning, or what the book calls “faith,” develops in stages throughout the human lifetime (much as human awareness and self-identity was seen to develop in stages by such psychologists, sociologists, and thinkers as Piaget, Erikson, and Kohlberg). Fowler identifies six stages of faith: Stage 1: Intuitive-Projective Faith; Stage 2: Mythic-Literal Faith; Stage 3: Synthetic-Conventional Faith; Stage 4: Individuative-Reflective Faith; Stage 5: Conjunctive Faith; and Stage 6: Universalizing Faith.

What made the book helpful for me was certainly not the names of the six stages (!), but rather the idea/theory that the human quest for and understanding of meaning, aka faith, progresses and evolves in definable ways throughout one’s lifetime. This has certainly been my experience. The Christian faith in which I was raised by my seminary professor parents has had many twists and turns (which is why I have long found the concept of faith as journey to be particularly meaningful), including periods of intense questioning, along with ones of significant insight and understanding. Fowler helped me understand that while faith can look backward (and see the roads or paths it has traveled) it cannot look forward (and see where it has not yet been). This helps me (and requires me!) to be patient with those whose faith is at different stages than mine. The earlier faith stages tend to be more literal, whereas later stages become progressively more able to “hold things lightly” and to see life in more unitive terms.

It can be particularly helpful (dare I say “fun”?!) to apply these stages to biblical characters, from Abraham, Moses and the prophets to Jesus, his disciples, and the Apostle Paul. While Jesus’ “faith” can be easily seen to typify Stage 6 (notably throughout his ministry as portrayed in the gospels), the faith of these other characters can definitely be seen to change and progress. I have long been particularly fascinated by the Apostle Paul, and how he evolved (quite dramatically at times) from being a literalist Pharisee to his eventual vocation as an apologist and ambassador of Christ. Whether one analyzes that evolution in psycho-social terms or spiritual terms, it’s hard to not see his journey as one of profound growth.

Where are we in terms of our spiritual journeys to this point? Are we still growing? Has our faith felt stagnant at times? What stages can we identify? What life events may have contributed to those stages? May we in the church show lots of grace to one another! And, even if we don't reach Fowler's Stage Six in our lifetimes, may we nevertheless keep growing in our quest to become ever more like Christ.

Tom

Verse of the Week:

Romans 10:17 - "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."

Among Our Friends and In Our Prayers

- Pray for wisdom for our **Care Committee** as they have been downsizing our care groups. Pray that God's love will be experienced by all who are no longer closely tied to our congregation as the committee members share about changes.
- Pray for **our future** as a church and the leadership God has for us as well as all interim and transitional pastors in WDC, as they accompany congregations navigating change and discerning future pastoral leadership.

Upcoming Events

- **Tonight:** Session 2 of the Bible Study for the "Anabaptist 500" contribution, led by Doug Miller. The study will be on Exodus 9 -10 at 7:00pm.
- **Memorial Service and Luncheon** next Wednesday beginning at 11:00am for Lois Groening.
- **Sunday, March 26th:** Spirit'N'Celebration ensemble from Hillsboro High School will be sharing three musical selections during our worship service. All are invited to stay for lunch when we will provide sloppy joes for everyone. Please bring a salad/side dish to share along with a dessert.
- **Holy Week:**
 - Maundy Thursday Worship - 7:00pm in the sanctuary April 6th.
 - Sunrise Service @ Hiebert's - 6:30am April 9th.
 - Easter Brunch @ FMC Fellowship Hall - 9:00am, April 9th.
 - Easter Worship - 10:30am in the sanctuary, April 9th.

- **Date Change:** Our next “faspa” gathering will be April 2nd at 4pm. Stay posted for details.

Other Announcements

- **Help needed** for serving the memorial celebration luncheon for Lois Groening next Wednesday. Please let Sharon Diener or Eydie Graber know if you are available!
- **YouTube links** for our worship from last week will be sent together with this coming week due to Pastor Tom being out of town. (He is our only expert for that task! Let us know if you would like to be trained.)
- **Our new sign** has been installed! Many thanks to our hardworking stewardship team for getting this accomplished.
- Equipment has begun to arrive for the new ministry of **Food4Kids**. A job well done by a faithful crew of closet organizers and movers! (This is not the same as closet eaters or closet drinkers even though food supplies are involved! :)
- **Ministry Council** has decided that we should begin looking for a transitional pastor 1/2 to 3/4 time. Kathy at WDC has been notified and will begin looking for us.
- **The WDC Resource Library is looking for wrapping paper donations** to be used in the summer reading program. Any holiday, any style--we'd be happy to use up some "vintage" odds and ends from your house. :) Email Jennie at crlib@mennowdc.org if you have some to donate.