

Why?

Why did you come to church this morning? You knew the insanely talented Rev. Dr. Chris Ayers was going to be at the beach, and not here preaching. You could have gotten a couple more hours of sleep on this weekend in your air conditioned home to recuperate from this past sizzling summer week. Let me rephrase my first question: What made you come here? Was it because of your significant other? Was it because you still hear your parents' voices in your head if you don't get up and go to church? Was it the fact that our friends that like to picket outside scared you into the church? Why did you come here?!? Sleep is such a wonderful thing...believe me, I'm a college student. Did you want to hear what I had to say that badly? It can't be that, because we all know that on the church's website, approximately 7 seconds after the service ends, that preacher of ours will have posted the sermon, streaming video, an online form of communion, and made a discussion board for all that happened in this hour, or however long. Or is it because you find comfort here in this church? Because you know that you have a place in this sanctuary, in this congregation, no matter what is going on in your life, be it at home or at work. No matter what race, gender, or sexual orientation. No matter how much you feel the world perceives you in a negative light. You have a home here, and you know that. We're all family and friends.

By a show of hands, how many of you played the game "telephone" when you were a little kid? I don't want to know if you still play it as an adult, please keep that to yourself. Ok, good, so most of you are familiar with what I am talking about. How often was the correct message given in the final "call?" Not too many times, and if so, then you probably didn't play the game too long because that makes it boring, doesn't it? Do you

realize that the game telephone is an oversimplified version of all communication in life? No matter what you say, what I say, he says, she says, they say, it's all a matter of interpretation. Why is the Japanese soldier never glorified in the American History text books? Vice Versa. Think about the bible. The word of God. When was God's word copyrighted? If you look in the front you will see the Old Testament was copyrighted in 1976. Basically the face-lifted version of God's word is younger than most of you in here. How many versions were rewritten to come to the final product that rests on the back of the pew in front of you? Why have there been so many? Why are there different versions: King James, Good News, King Dean? Whatever form in which it has been written. I'm not saying that the bible is fictitious or untrue by any means. I'm just simply asking you to consider the source from which you are reading and forming your belief set. I believe the bible ought to be taken in its entirety. With that said, what's the message or theme of the bible? I think a general consensus would arrive at the conclusion that the message is to "Love everyone" or "Love thy neighbor and your God as you love thyself." Proof-texting, which is taking little stories from the bible to prove your point, is what is done too often to misconstrue the work in its entirety. See the big picture.

It's a little paradoxical, but I'll now be proof-texting some myself, and reading an excerpt of scripture from Numbers 14:39-45 (pg 147). It says: When Moses told the Israelites what the LORD had said, they mourned bitterly. Early the next morning they started out to invade the hill country, saying, "Now we are ready to go to the place which the LORD told us about. We admit that we have sinned." But Moses said, "Then why are you disobeying the LORD now? You will not succeed! Don't go. The LORD is not with you, and your enemies will defeat you. When you face the Amalekites and the Canaanites,

you will die in battle; the LORD will not be with you, because you have refused to follow him.” Yet they still dared to go up into the hill country, even though neither the LORD’S Covenant Box nor Moses left the camp. Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who lived there attacked and defeated them, and pursued them as far as Hormah.

This story from the Old Testament seems true of a lot of things in life. More than just the fact that we have been told from a very young age how to perceive God and why you should never question God’s doings or teachings. It’s ironic that I stand at a pulpit as I say this, but too often in churches people preach down to you as opposed to talking with you. It seems to subconsciously create this inferiority complex. But why do we get down on ourselves? Is it a deep emotional issue stemming from letting a loved one down, or is it because we don’t meet society’s standards, the church’s standards? Most likely a combination of each of these. But WHY would it ever be because we don’t meet society’s “standards” or the church’s “standards?” This is where I admire the people at this church. I know what a lot of you have come from, being a recovering Christian or Southern Baptist and whatnot, but you have not been scared to go against the grain and find yourself. You question authority, and yes sometimes it is to the point of disobeying. But you do not blindly believe whatever is told to you. As with the bible verse, you might have been scolded by someone when you’ve done what *you* believe and think is right, and you might be attacked and defeated in a minor battle as predicted, but you stood up for yourself and your beliefs, which make you win in the end in this metaphorical war of life.

It was relatively simple for me to pick out this text to support my point, which in turn supports another point. You get out of the bible what you put into it, as with life. It has good and bad, things that support you and things that go against you, but it is open to

interpretation for you. It's your clay that you mould into whatever statue you choose. I may make a Hokie from the same clay that my mother makes a flower, but my sculpture is no greater or no less than my mother's, at least in value. If you ask about aesthetic appearance, then that's a different story. It's important to be introspective. Why tell someone that their interpretation is wrong? Why are you so certain that there are no flaws in your thought process? Too often we try to fix other people's lives and problems before we have everything correct with ourselves. Why is it easier to fight the evil in your face than the evil in your heart? We've spent an amount of money on fixing things elsewhere that is too large for most of us to even fathom instead of attempting to solve problems like homelessness and hunger in this country. Why do we fight a war to put democracy into a group of people that are naturally torn because of their two religious sects? Why do we do this when there are people on the streets of Charlotte and other cities that die each day because we are at war with ourselves? People that are friends of those I went to school with and still talk to. I'm not trying to be greedy or self-centered, but before we find world peace, we've got to find a peace to end the war in the streets.

A lot of "why" questions that are asked are too broad and general and quite frankly, have no one definitive answer. "Why did *my* friend get shot? Why did the tragedies of April 16th, 2007 have to happen at Virginia Tech? Why did *my* aunt have to get cancer?" When you ask a question, an answer is usually desired, but with questions like this, it's comforting to most people because they can point fingers while knowing there is going to be no answer. We ought to ask questions with more substance and an answer that we can learn from, such as "Why did I not go visit my aunt more often while she was living with this illness?" These answerable types of why questions help us see problems and make

positive change within ourselves and our society if we choose to face them. Here are a few to think about:

Why do we get rid of our friends that change for a guy or a girl?

Why do you worry about someone's clothes if their words are gonna change the world?

Why do we have technology for hybrid cars and spaceships on Mars, but no cure for AIDS?

Why do inner-city schools care more about a kid's braids than they care for his grades?

Why are the youth looked down upon for wearing earrings and hats turned backwards?

Why is Jesus Christ never played by black actors?

When there's so many thrones, why do we argue who is the King?

Why do we know it in our hearts, but it remains unseen?

That right there that you just heard is a product of listening to and being influenced by rap music. Whereas it has a negative connotation in many eyes, it's been able to provide me with a better understanding of rhythm and rhyme along with seeing a deeper meaning in books I read or situations in life. It is another example of breaking down the barrier keeping us as individuals and as a society from the unknown and misunderstood.

One thing that was understood was that I didn't have a consistent job lined up for this summer until my fellow Hokie-lover, Jennifer Purves, literally got me a position with her company. I was fortunate enough to work in close proximity with her in a pharmacy, and my eyes were opened quite a bit to a problem that I have thought about for years. Why do people choose medications to deal with emotional problems rather than finding a natural solution? It's almost as though our society has taught us to look for an excuse for any deviation in behavior and appearance from those around us that are "normal." We are

taught that if we don't fit the mould of one of these so-called human beings then there is something wrong with us. My diagnosis says that "something" is called diversity. Obviously there are extreme cases, but we have become far too dependent on medications to make us a prototypical person.

Say your buddy James Smith goes on a date with a girl from work that he fell for from the moment she started at their company last year. James is much happier than normal, and it seems to be affecting you. Even though you have a significant other, you feel like something is wrong, and wonder what it could be. Alas, you come to the conclusion that you are depressed. Something has to be wrong with you if you aren't as happy as James. So you go to your doctor and tell him you need Prozac. He doesn't exactly think you need it, but due to the fact that there is no graft in the medical system in our country he prescribes it to you. You are now putting chemicals into your body because you weren't as happy as a friend on a certain week. This is a very general example, but it happens on a much larger extreme than many realize, or care to think about.

Why do we get down on ourselves? Is it really because we aren't like someone else? We are all human beings in the big picture, and our little idiosyncratic ways are what makes us who we are. We are not all James Smith, just as we are not all Saddam Hussein, Mother Teresa, or Chris Ayers. In my opinion, we don't need to confine ourselves to trying to perfectly fit these moulds laid down before us. People think, "I am only one person, I can't make a difference," but in actuality you are a lot less different than you think. Don't follow someone else if you don't truly believe in what they stand for. Are you fearful of being the only one to stand up for something? There's a quote that I feel sums my point up perfectly. I attribute it to W.E.B. Du Bois, prayer books, and the movie

“Coach Carter,” because I don’t know from where it actually originates, but it reads, “Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, ‘Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?’ Actually, who are you not to be? Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won’t feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. It is not just in some of us; it is in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”

Who all watches shows like E! True Hollywood to get the latest scoop on Paris Hilton or Lindsey Lohan? It’s sad to think that young girls in this country look up to these ladies and want to look like them and be like them. Girls will take diet pills or simply not eat to try to have the same figure as Paris or Lindsey. Think about these so-called role models that we glorify by giving them this much publicity, or sadly, even mentioning them in church. Don’t aspire to look like Lindsey Lohan. Aspire to have her bank account or be the type of friend she is. Think about it, how many of your friends would hold your cocaine for you? Break the mould and be proud of who you are and what you stand for. You be the person that celebrities try to look like instead of it being the other way around. Better yet, be the person that the youth of this nation wish to be when they grow up, and I don’t think there would be anybody that would ask “why” you were doing that.

It sickens me to think that on April 16th I told my friends back home that I felt bad because I wasn’t crying with everyone else. I know that I handle grief differently than most, as learned in past experiences, but for some reason I let one of society’s standards

get to me. The standard that says, “you must cry when someone dies, especially someone you know or people at your school, or else you are heartless and something is ‘wrong’ with you.” It’s not like I was walking around like nothing happened, or throwing a party in my dorm that night because there was no class the next day. I was frustrated that I gave into that and even more by the sad reality that our society has this kind of impact on people. I have no regrets about feeling the way I did, and the next time “normal grieving” is expected, I will most likely do the same. I will continue to be myself, Glenn Dean Johnson, Jr.

Although I said it in a relatively jocular tone earlier, I seriously meant it when I asked why you came here this morning. Think about why you are here. Why were you motivated to get up this morning and continue on with your life? We all have our own reasons, but I just hope that you think of them before you do whatever it is that partake in or act upon each day. I’ll share with you why I get up every morning: To make the most of everything I have been given by friends and family, past and present that have worked hard to make my life better. So, I’ll leave you with one thought: Why does it take a loved one to die for you to miss them? And why does it take someone to ask why for you to listen?