

“That’s what the gospel says,” I said simply. He paused and asked one more question.

“Well then, how realistic is the gospel?” Just like that, he laid the question on the table. Now it was my turn to pause. But my next statement was not what he expected to hear.

“That may be one of the best questions ever raised in a Confirmation program,” I said matter of factly. He was expecting a challenge, not a compliment. When he saw that my comment was sincere, he smiled and accepted congratulations from his buddies at the table.

“You have just helped all of us see, very clearly, that the main reason we have set aside time to prepare for Confirmation is to consider the role of the gospel in our lives. We must, individually, decide whether or not we want to live by that Word and accept the consequences that come with that decision. Well done.”

More discussion followed, but the whole evening had, with that one question, been raised to a new level. We had moved from applauding brawls to reassessing everyday occurrences at home and at school, but now, in the light of the gospel. “The gospel is the reason for the brick and mortar of this building, for the new church next door, for Confirmation, and even for me. If there were no gospel, there would be no Beacon Street.”

I was able to offer one more point for consideration before we moved on to the lesson planned for the evening. “If you were at school and someone brushed by rather rudely, knocking your books to the floor, what would you do?”

Without hesitation the young man spat out, “Get him.”

“And if several of your buddies were standing with you and they began to say things like “leave him alone,” “he’s not worth it,” or “let’s just go,” would you consider their comments as you decided what to do?” I asked.

“Probably,” he said thoughtfully.

“Good.” I said. “That’s called ‘church’. It’s community. And sometimes we desperately need community to help us do what we cannot do on our own.”

It was done. Forty-five minutes of back and forth that had begun with an exhilarating “sweet.” It will probably be remembered as one of the best (or at

least better) parts of the twenty-hour, six-session program. Several of the candidates will certainly note this discussion on their end-of-the-year evaluation. It was timely and it focused precisely where most of these kids need the most help these days: in their decision-making. It is where we, as parents and teachers, hope values and good habits and courage come into play. And we do not serve them well if we make those moments look any less difficult than they are. Admittedly, we adults don’t always decide well either.

I smile when I think of what my ninth-grade theology teacher would have done had I asked such a question in religion class. “How realistic is the gospel” would have warranted a lecture and a few detentions. These days, I’m grateful for any turn of events that prompts the kind of focus and discernment we had last Thanksgiving in Chesterland. “Go Browns!”

Ask

Akhi...



Dear Akhi,

We ran out of oil for our lamps. Our local suppliers have none. They are not expecting any shipments.
Empty Oil Tin

Dear Empty Tin,

I have no lamp. Each day, Akhi uses only what the sun provides. It is how Allah has provided from the beginning of time. Some of yesterday’s sun is now stored in plants, or in the animals that have eaten the plants. Allah is good to have provided some of yesterday’s sun for today. But when yesterday’s is gone, it is gone forever!

Allah provides for all of our needs. Is it possible that some of us want more than is provided in a day! Am I entitled to more of yesterday’s sunlight than you? Akhi begs only for what he can eat today, or for what he chooses to give to others. Each day has sufficient blessings. Allah be praised.

When the sun goes down, rest. When it comes up again, give thanks, and begin your day. Do all your work while the sun shines.

No lamp! Just enlightened.