

## Column

When I was a boy, I was easily distracted. To help me stay on track, I was put at a desk in a quiet room and required to sit there until I finished my homework, often a page of math sums. What did I do? I looked out the window at the chickens scratching in the grass and longed to be outside with them.

Then I would rummage through the desk at which I was seated and pull out staplers, markers, slide rulers and compasses and play with them. Eventually, however, I learned a lesson, one equally important to the math sums: if you want to escape the misery of homework and go out and play, the best way to achieve that goal is to focus on the task at hand and finish it . . . not to succumb to distractions.

Distractions not only plague individuals but groups, including churches. In the case of the latter, they include anything that takes the focus off the Good News of Jesus Christ, its proclamation and living out of that Good News in the world.

One manifestation of a distraction-succumbed church is addressing questions people out there on the street are for the most part not asking. A recent example is a statement from the Archbishop of York saying that he found the opening address of the Lord's Prayer – "Our Father" – problematic.

Really? How many people do you know who are scurrying to get to work on time in the morning, dealing with conflicts in the workplace and at home, attempting to make ends meet in the face of soaring prices, are troubled with how Jesus began His model prayer? For most, I dare say, the thought has never entered their head.

Those of a thoughtful bent are much more likely to ask such questions as: Why I am here? Why is the world in such a mess? How

can it (along with myself) be put right? Is there anything beyond this present life?

Which has the more appeal? The musing of an aging western prelate (church official)? Or, the sure word of the God of earth and sky, the God who has come among us in the man Christ Jesus? Let's scratch where people are itching.

Another distraction that has appeared in recent days involves a Lutheran pastor outside Minneapolis who made headlines with her so-called "sparkle creed." Finding the affirmations of faith that have served the Church for 2000 years too restrictive, she found one that resonates with her personal angst and lines up with the spirit of the age. Instead of affirming belief in "God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth," her creed acknowledges a nonbinary deity having two dads.

Blasphemous? Jarring? Out of line with scripture and the unbroken tradition of the Christian Church? Most Christians would say so. Allow me to be provocative and say that none of these is the real problem. As outlandish as this 'creed' may sound, it poses no lasting threat to the Christian Church. Christianity is remarkably resilient and can withstand questioning from friend and foe alike.

The problem with the 'sparkle creed' is that it is a distraction. It (along with the Archbishop of York's musing on the Lord's Prayer) may be compared to the chickens I watched through the window and the items in the desk that took my focus off my math sums. It takes people's attention off what is central: God so loved the world (including individuals within it who are hurting and broken) that He sent His Son to bring healing and hope, transformation and life. All of which are freely offered to those who believe and give their allegiance to Jesus.

Let's keep the main thing the main thing. We are the good news team in a world drowning in bad. May nothing blunt our mission. Christ

is risen! In Him we can as well! Let that alone be our focus and message.

*LORD of all power and might, who art the author and giver of all good things; Graft in our hearts the love of thy Name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of thy great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Collect for the Seventh Sunday after Trinity, the Book of Common Prayer).*

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