

Personally speaking about your faith

Ministers are supposed to be able to preach well. With enough profundity and supported by the necessary communicative skills a sermon may well take more than 15 minutes. But if you ask any minister to tell you in three sentences what he or she believes him/herself, than they often do not know what to say. Giving a twenty minutes long sermon is obviously easier than saying in a few sentences what your own position is.

This month many local congregations have their “kick-off-Sunday”. The Protestant Church gave as national theme ‘we believe’, and published a paper in which well-known and less well-known Dutchmen told what they believe. The paper is an invitation to the readers to rephrase again where they are in their faith themselves. 180.000 copies of the paper were spread in a short period. Obviously a need is filled.

Where does this need come from? We live in a culture in which there is a lot of shame to speak personally about faith. At the same time I notice a growing need among young people for personal and authentic stories. Young people want (maybe even *demand*) authenticity and congruence. With the term congruence I want to say that speaking and acting should coincide like two congruent triangles. If this is not the case the other person will see through that very soon: he says this, but he does that. So there is need for authentic, reliable and congruent people with their accompanying religious stories.

In my own congregation I asked five people to tell something about their personal faith during the kick-off-Sunday. Immediately the two young people I had asked replied positively, an 87-year-old-man thought about it a little longer and then sent me his text which he read during worship. Quote from that:
“It is sometimes said that old people often think and talk about ‘the old days’. My experience is that if nowadays something is said or done which reminds me of what I experienced in the old days, then I think: Shouldn’t I have said or done that differently? But the gratitude remains that God does not drop us, in spite of our failures. What a bliss that we may live from His forgiveness. Living from that we may meet each other in church, accepting the other in gratitude in order to show something of Gods meaning.”

Prime Minister Balkenende said it like this, when our secretary Arjan Plaisier presented him with the paper ‘we believe’ early September: “Faith carries you, it gives you strength. I experienced that in my work. The church is a resting point. You can recharge there. I hope that many will receive that inspiration as well.”

Speaking of personally speaking...

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