

CONNECTING THE DOTS

“This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.” —ACTS 9:15

How did Paul communicate such a radical new faith to both pagans and Jews who were totally in the dark about the Gospel? A key principle in communication is to explain what is unknown in light of what is known; that is, if you want to teach something unknown, it has to be done in such a way that it can be related to something that is known.

Every society and culture has assumptions that lie behind the way they think and act, which is why there is uniformity in the way a culture works. To use a modern term, there is a ‘metanarrative’, which means there is a big story or picture that lies behind a society’s views. There are two meta-narratives behind the thinking of the people to whom Paul is preaching.

Every Jewish person believed they were God’s chosen people. In the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch, Paul stands up and relates to them what they already know. He starts with, “The God of the people of Israel chose our fathers,” then retraces the history of the Jewish people, and follows it up with, “And from this God has brought the Saviour, Jesus, as he promised.” Paul connected the dots with what they already knew, and the Jewish people could then relate this new faith to centuries of their history.

Paul used the second meta-narrative in the predominately pagan city of Lystra where people believed in many different gods. After healing a crippled man, Paul and Barnabas were hailed as gods, but they

adamantly objected, saying, “We are ordinary men like you and we are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them. He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons, he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.” Acts 14:14-17.

Paul relates the world these people live in to what they can identify with. He talks about the very existence of life itself and all creation. Where does that come from? The living God made this. He is the Creator and provider, but Paul refrains from saying anything relating to Jewish heritage. He connects their dots with things they know, which, in turn, leads them to the one living God.

The skill of Paul with the Jews and pagans was to identify the dots and connect them from the deepest aspirations of their hearts to the Living God. In our witness for Christ, we need to do the same; first discern what is in a person’s heart; then, like Paul, connect the dots that will lead them to Christ.

PRAYER: Dear Lord, Help me to be discerning in recognizing where a person stands in their life, and then be able to connect the dots that will lead them to You. Thank You, Lord.

TO REFLECT UPON: Do I have a different approach in my witness for Christ to those who already have a faith and those who do not?