

Smoky Mountain Reflections #157

Sometimes information can be interesting and fun, though relatively useless. For example, the word “excellent” has had many slang renderings over the years. In 1375 it was “gay”, in 1794 “dandy”, while “neat” and “swell” date back to 1810. In 1896 it was “fly”, in 1920 “wicked”, then “solid”, “groovy” and “cool” came out in the 1930’s. In the 1970’s we had “bomb” and “rad”, and in the 1990’s “beast” and “chronic” came to denote excellence. I come from a time when “killer” and “awesome” were the words of choice, but I find myself uninformed as to the current slang rendering of “excellent”.

Sometimes information is interesting, puzzling, or frightening. For example, we spend on average 2.66 hours per day on leisure and sport activities while at the same time watching an average of 2.77 hours of television. It seems TV watching is overlapping into other activities, which means we have a nation of multi-taskers doing lots of things (poorly) at the same time instead of one thing at a time with focus and care. If you are considering parenthood, it is estimated that it will cost you \$245,340.00 to get your child to the age of 17. Any parent knows though that a quarter of a million is a small price to pay for the privilege of being a parent, even with its ups and downs.

Finally, information can also be helpful as we seek to understand our neighbor so that we might speak the truth in love to them and share the Gospel. Just that phrase “share the gospel” causes some of us to shrink in fear, but that need not be the case. Helpful information can strengthen our resolve, making it easier to share that sweet Gospel with others. So, here is some helpful information about our nation, our community, and our church. While there has been an increase in the “nones” (those who do not claim any faith) and while there has been a 2.2% decrease in membership of the mainline churches (from 1991-2012), not all of the information is bleak. Conservative Bible teaching churches have seen a 0.6% increase according to General Social Survey Data from that period. These may seem like small numbers, but remember that these small percentages represent millions of people. While it is sad that 18% of Christians are abandoning the faith, it is encouraging to know that 82% are holding to God’s promises. There is also an interesting link between successful marriages and regular (weekly) church attendance.

Enough on the national figures though--let’s look at some data on our own community. Our neighborhood here in Sevier County is similar to most of the nation; half of our neighbors have a church home but less than 20% of our neighbors regularly (weekly) attend church. That means that 4 out of every 5 people you live and work around are spiritually starving but our community is well above the national average when it comes to Faith in Christ. We are below the national average when it comes to pro-choice and pro-homosexual-marriage views but 49.3% of our neighbors still believe abortion should be legal and 33.5% believe same gender couples should be allowed to marry.

So, how is this helpful in sharing your faith? Well, now you know what sort of people you may be speaking with so that when you speak the truth in love you can ask a few questions and be ready with some good answers. What is your faith background? Do you have a church home? What do you believe? Invite your neighbor to tell you about their faith. You would be surprised how willing people are to talk about what they believe. If you discover that your neighbor is part of that 20% figure (an active member of a Trinitarian Christian Church), then you can encourage each other in the faith while learning about your differences. If you discover them to be something other than a saved Trinitarian Christian who is regularly being fed in church, you then have a great opportunity to share the light with someone who is in darkness. If they are not interested, then politely offer to answer or find answers to any faith questions they might have in the future, and respect their request, change the subject and of course keep them in your prayers.

Have a blessed Lenten season,

In Christ,
Pastor Portier