

Sermon

Come to Believe

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Bacon Memorial Presbyterian Church

April 16, 2023

Good morning – this second Sunday of Easter. We left the sanctuary a week ago filled with joy singing “Lift High the Cross” and knowing on some level that God is indeed alive. And then life, as life usually does, remained exactly as it was. We had the same worries, the same concerns, maybe some of us experienced more that we will raise up in prayer today. So how do we hold on to that Easter morning feeling? Or just that Sunday morning feeling in the face of things difficult, overwhelming, sad or just plain difficult? We know for we believers we were not promised a life without difficulty and yet we have different expectations. When I was a girl my mom would always sing to me when I complained about one thing or another...maybe you remember this tune...”I beg your pardon, I never promised you a rose garden” And that used to make me so mad...but she was right. When we think on some level that we are entitled to an easy life, we inevitable end up confused and disappointed. But sometimes life deals us blows that seem unfair, unbalanced and just plain too much. I was reading a story this week about a family whose young son died suddenly and then within a year, the father was diagnosed with leukemia and died. How do we take this Sunday morning, this Easter feeling with us through moments like that.

When the disciples and believers were given this incredible gift, this moment that fulfilled their beliefs, their hopes, the resurrection – it was with such amazement and great joy they accepted it. I want you to think back upon your life

to a moment like that. For me it was a little red bike. I was turning 4, maybe 5, and my mom and dad shopped at Twin Fair – some of you may know that store. It was the original Walmart where you could buy groceries and goods in the same store...so while mom was grocery shopping, my dad would walk me around the toys or whatever to kill time. Well, we came upon the most beautiful, the most incredible, the shiniest Radio Flyer bike with training wheels. I loved that bike but we didn't have money for that sort of thing – not a Radio Flyer, not new – I was the youngest in my family so I knew hand me down bikes were in my future. So each week I would go and visit that bike...until one week, it was gone. Like the empty tomb – that bike was gone and I resolved myself that it was over. No bike. Well soon thereafter, it was my birthday...my grandparents took me out to lunch and when I came home, my mom met me at the door with a string. She told me to follow that string until I found it at the end – my Radio Flyer bike! I was beyond happy, excited, blessed, thrilled! And it did not disappoint. I loved that bike until I was way too big to ride it.

So with that energy, that expectation, that wonderment - I'm going to reread our first reading from ACTs in a more of a story telling way.

“But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them: ‘Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say.

²²“You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know—²³this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God,

you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. ²⁴But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power. ²⁵For David says concerning him, ‘I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken; ²⁶therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; moreover my flesh will live in hope. ²⁷For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One experience corruption. ²⁸You have made known to me the ways of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.’ ²⁹“Fellow Israelites, I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. ³⁰Since he was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would put one of his descendants on his throne. ³¹Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying, ‘He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh experience corruption.’ ³²This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses.”

When I look back on my moment of YESSS! At the age of 5, I think, did I focus too much on that moment, or did I truly enjoy what was at the end of the string? In our liturgy, on these Sundays, do we focus too much on the empty cross, on the story I just read and not enough on what was at the end of that string? The living Christ...a God who loved us so much, a God who wants to be in constant relationship with us through all moments – good and bad. Let me rephrase that – a God who IS with us in all moments – good and bad – whether we know it or not.

Let’s look at our New Testament scripture from John 20:19-31:

“When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” 20After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” 22When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. 23If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” 24But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

26A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” 27Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” 28Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” 29Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” 30Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. 31But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.”

Oh Thomas – this recounting gets told at times in a way that is really not true- we refer to Thomas as “doubting Thomas” don’t we? Can we really blame

him? Have you ever heard an incredible rumor and rather than just believe, you do a little investigating as to whether it's true...of course we do! There's a lot of misinformation out there. So why do we fault Thomas for wanting to do a little misinformation. He never doubted Jesus – he just wasn't entirely sure he could believe it without being certain. The Romans were pretty awful and I'm sure there was a sense inside of him – are they setting us up? Are they making fun of us? At this point, they are just beginning to understand truly that this is indeed God incarnate and that through the evil of man God was murdered. This is a lot to wrap your head around. So Jesus does an incredible thing. He comes to Thomas and the others – in that doubt, in that uncertainty. He goes through a locked door and offers his body, once again, to Thomas so he can indeed believe. But know fully, Jesus does not come to gain Thomas's allegiance to him as God – Jesus comes to offer God's peace to him in that moment of uncertainty, in that moment of wonderment. “Do not doubt but believe”

We all have our own Thomas events in our lives – those experiences that make us feel alone or overwhelmed with grief or pain. Perhaps we are caring for a loved one who continues to get ill despite treatments and medications. Perhaps our financial picture is bleak. Maybe we struggle with addiction or we have a relationship that is falling apart. There's a lot in this life that lead us into those locked rooms, unsure, afraid, suspicious about whether God will show up in our pain.

“A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them

and said, "Peace be with you." Whatever you are going through at this moment, whatever struggle you find yourself in, there is no door you can lock that can keep Jesus out of your heart, out of your situation. If you are wondering, if you are not feeling that presence – take a moment right now...close your eyes – quiet your mind of all the human reasoning and energy you have placed upon the situation – and picture Jesus coming through a locked door. Do you see him standing in front of you? In whatever way you imagine Jesus? Do you see? He is speaking to you..."Peace be with you." My peace – not the peace the world gives – my peace. Because my peace is one of grace, my peace is one of answers, my peace is one that allows you to not have all the answers and still feel loved, still feel worthy, still believe answers will come in God's time.

These scriptures are incredibly powerful. They bring us away from the cross, away from the tomb and into a true relationship with God – a God who never leaves us, a God who walks with us through every moment even when we create the disaster. There is never any judgement just love and grace.There is never any judgement, just love and grace.

Peace be with you – in those tough days, remember the moment when you found your Radio Flyer bike belief – when you truly came to believe that God was going to see you through everything, all things. Unlock the door – Jesus is waiting.

Amen

