

Real Faith Doesn't Fish

We have been spending time the last several weeks in the Gospel of John. And, if we have been paying attention we have discovered a lot of emphasis on believing. As Jesus said to Nicodemus in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but has everlasting life." John 3:18 is even more insistent as it says, "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son." Beloved, this is what it's all about. The Gospel is given to us and preached to us that we may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Savior, and that by believing in Him we may all have life--real life--in His name.

But the question that this raises for us to answer this morning is this, what does it mean to believe? What does it mean to believe in Jesus in the way the Scriptures require us to believe? I'm making a distinction here between our notion, our definition, of belief and that offered by the Scriptures. It's God's definition of belief that we need because that's the only one that counts when it comes to our salvation. We must believe in the way God tells us we must believe; anything less than that won't do. So that's what we are looking for this morning; we are looking for God's definition of what it means to believe in Jesus.

Coming back to our Scripture passage for this morning we read in John 4:43-45: "After the two days he left for Galilee. (Now Jesus himself had pointed out that a prophet has no honor in his own country.) When he arrived in Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him. They had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, for they also had been there."

It is interesting here how John inserts Jesus' quote that "a prophet has no honor in his own country." In Matthew 13 and Mark 6, when Jesus makes this statement, the context makes it clear that He is talking about His hometown of Nazareth of Galilee. The people in His hometown were familiar with Jesus' family. They knew His mothers and His brothers and sisters. They knew Jesus had worked among them as a carpenter, a trade he had learned from the man Joseph whom they knew as His father. Mark 6:5 tells us that Jesus was not able to do many mighty works in Nazareth except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. Mark 6:6 says that Jesus was amazed at their lack of faith.

In John, however, the application of Jesus' quote about a prophet having no honor in his own country, is much less clear. In fact, the

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application may be very different. The context here is that Jesus is coming from Jerusalem and Judea through Samaria and back to Galilee. And, the reason He is coming back is that opposition to His teaching in Jerusalem has grown to the point of becoming dangerous. The religious leaders in Judea have rejected Him and are planning ways to stir up trouble for Him and to silence Him. Nicodemus has been the one exception and even his support is uncertain by the end of their private late night meeting. To the point of our Scripture passage in John 4, John records no specific miracles in Judea. Nicodemus seems to have heard of some, but none are listed. In fact the only outright miracle noted in John's Gospel prior to the end of John 4, occurs in Cana of Galilee in John 2, where Jesus turns water into wine.

So, in John, Jesus is rejected in Judea but is welcomed in Galilee. It seems to me that John is giving a deeper meaning to the statement that a prophet has no honor in his own country. What was Jesus' own country? Although He had grown up in Nazareth, He was--after all--born in Bethlehem of Judea, and in Luke 2:49, He said of lingering in the Temple at Jerusalem, "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" The truth is that Jesus was rejected both in Nazareth and in Judea, but for different reasons. Residents of Nazareth rejected Him because of their rejection of themselves. They tended to look down on themselves and couldn't grasp that anyone among them could possibly rise to greatness. The town folks in Nazareth agreed with the assessment of those outside of Nazareth who held the opinion that nothing good could ever come from Nazareth, (that's what Nathaniel says in John 2:46). Among the religious leaders in Judea, however, their rejection of Jesus was based on jealousy of Jesus' authority and fear that He would usurp their power and upset the status quo they had crafted to protect and profit themselves. The truth is that Jesus came to His own, to His own people in Nazareth, and to His own country in Judea, and His own received Him not. He was received without honor in both places.

The Galileans, however, welcomed Him. Our first clue as to what it means to believe in Jesus is found in this simple phrase; they welcomed Him; the Galileans welcomed Jesus into their villages and into their lives. To put it another way the Galileans showed hospitality to Jesus; they opened their hearts to Him, opened their lives to Him, had room in their worlds for Jesus. In fact, they stopped whatever else they were doing and paid attention to Him.

What this tells us is that to believe in Jesus is not just some mental exercise, the fulfillment of religious duties, or some repetitious stating of a creed. It's not a matter of giving Him room in our lives for an hour

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or two on Sunday morning. It's not a matter of acknowledging Jesus with nice words or remembering to pray to Him in moments of extreme need. No, that's way too shallow. To believe in Jesus is to welcome Him into our hearts and to pay attention to His commands and to listen to His voice and to follow His Spirit everyday of our lives. We all need to pray, "**Come into my heart, Lord Jesus.**"

As we look further into our Scripture passage this morning, John 4:46-48 say, "Once more he visited Cana in Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine. And there was a certain royal official whose son lay sick at Capernaum. When this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him and begged him to come and heal his son, who was close to death. "Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders," Jesus told him, "you will never believe."

These verses tell us something more about what it means to believe in Jesus. First, John tells us about a certain royal official. This was an important man, probably a man of authority in the court of Herod the king. His home and most likely his office too, were in Capernaum about 17 miles from Cana as the crow flies, or 24 miles by highway. It was a long walk or a substantial horseback ride. As far as we can tell this man had not met Jesus before, though he had heard about His miracles. No doubt he heard about Jesus turning water into wine in the village of Cana. The official's son was sick and apparently dying. So, without hesitation, the man makes the 24 mile trek to Cana, planning on taking Jesus back with him to Capernaum.

Believing in Jesus means welcoming Jesus into our lives. Believing in Jesus also means that when the chips are down and the thing most precious in our lives is threatened, Jesus will be the first one we turn to for assistance and for guidance. For those who believe with saving faith, Jesus is their closest friend and first line of defense in time of need. **Jesus is our shield. He is our place of refuge, our ever present help in time of need.**

The other thing we see in these verses is Jesus' rebuke against what we might call miracle mongering. "Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders," Jesus told him, "you will never believe." These seem like harsh words. The man came a long way to seek assistance for a beloved son. Surely his motives are pure, but are they? And, what about our motives? How many times have we prayed with mixed motives for God to help or heal someone. To be sure, we want to see persons made well and delivered from their troubles. We do care about them. But perhaps, at the same time, we are looking to get something for ourselves. If only Jesus would answer this one prayer then I would

believe, then I would put my faith in Him. But that is not what it means to believe in Jesus. The kind of faith God asks of us is front-loaded. Without faith, up front, it is impossible to please God. No, saving faith believes in the character and nature of God as revealed in the face of Jesus Christ "up front." We ask Him to help us and to intercede in the lives of others because we believe in Him and because we trust Him not so we can have our faith confirmed. Genuine belief in Jesus is not outcome dependent. In the midst of his troubles, Job prayed "Though He slays me, yet will I trust Him." In other words, Jesus is saying to this important official, "Do you really trust me? Or, are you just fishing for a miracle? **Real faith doesn't fish.**

We have seen so far that believing in Jesus means welcoming Him fully into our lives. It means seeking Him as our first line of defense in times of need. And, it also means trusting Him without the need for miraculous evidence or confirmation. Real faith doesn't fish.

The last part of our Scripture passage this morning includes verses 49-54: "The royal official said, 'Sir, come down before my child dies.' Jesus replied, 'You may go. Your son will live.' The man took Jesus at his word and departed. While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living. When he inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, 'The fever left him yesterday at the seventh hour.' Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, 'Your son will live.' So he and all his household believed. This was the second miraculous sign that Jesus performed, having come from Judea to Galilee."

It is clear in this account that Herod's official had in mind how the healing of his son should be accomplished. He would go get Jesus and Jesus would accompany him back to Capernaum. In Capernaum he and Jesus would go to his house and Jesus would lay hands on his son and heal him. Surely, as an important official, he could expect such special treatment. Jesus, however, had another idea. After warning him against seeking miraculous signs, Jesus gives him one for free. Jesus dismisses him, saying, "You may go. Your son will live." And, now, we see the fourth and most critical facet of what it means to believe in Jesus. The second half of verse 50 says of the official: "the man took Jesus at his word and departed."

Believing in Jesus means taking Jesus at His word. What about me and you? When we read the words of Jesus in the Bible do we take Him at His word or do we argue with Him or look for loop holes? When Jesus speaks to our hearts, convicting us of sin, do we acknowledge our sin, confess, and forsake that sin, or do we try to

wiggle out of it? When Jesus speaks words of guidance do we go where He leads us or make excuses why we can't go there or do that just now? Believing in Jesus means to believe Jesus. **Believing in Jesus means to take Him at His word.**

What does it mean to believe in Jesus? It means to welcome Him into our lives. It means seeking Him and counting on Him as our first line of defense in times of need. It means trusting Him up front. And, last but not least, it means taking Him at His word and acting upon His word.

What is interesting to me at the end of this account is that the miraculous sign that follows this man's faith in and obedience to Jesus is not so much the healing of his son as it is the timing of that healing. In the language of last week's message it was a "Kairos" moment. On his route home to Capernaum his servants met him on the way and told him that his son had recovered from his illness. Upon further inquiry, the man and his servants discovered that the young man began to recover the same moment Jesus said that he would live. There was no question in their minds. This was not coincidence, this was Kairos. This was the intervention of the Lord. The important official had welcomed Jesus into his life, sought Him out as his first line of defense in time of need, trusted Him up front, and taken Him at His word. In doing so, this man served as the spiritual head of his family and received great blessings. His son was healed and he and all of his family became followers of Jesus Christ.

What is your most urgent need today? Jesus is willing and able to meet you in that need. Will you welcome Him into your life and seek His presence to help you? Will you trust Him up front, regardless of the outcome? Will you take Him at His word and do what He commands? This is what it means to believe in Jesus.

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John 4:43-54

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