

A Passion for the Christ

In the last verse from our reading today from John 11:1-45 we read “Many of the people who were with Mary believed in Jesus when they saw this happen.” (John 11:45 NLT) The question I would like to ask this morning is, where did that belief take them? Remember how near we are to Good Friday, where were they? Where did that belief take them?

And I would like us to ask ourselves, why do we believe? What do we believe? And where does that belief take us? And I would dare to suggest that the answer to the last question is nowhere because believing in Jesus, in and by itself does not take us anywhere

The epistles are written to believers, Paul is writing to the believers in Rome and he says to them “So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death.” (Romans 8:6 NLT) Paul is saying this to those who have believed, who have seen God’s glory, who are the church in Rome “letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death” (Romans 8:6 NLT) surely they should know that shouldn’t they? I think what Paul is saying is, your belief won’t save you if your belief is not the right belief.

Think about it, believing is easy, believing in something that we see happen, believing in something which we see works, believing in the good things that God does in our lives, all that is easy. That kind of believing is an intellectual acceptance of the evidence before our eyes.

It is easy for you to believe that I exist, you can see me, you can hear me, if you came up you could touch me. But our faith requires that we take this a step further. I’m sure many of you can say to me that your belief is specific, that you believe that Jesus is the son of God, and I have to ask, so what? Satan Believes that Jesus Christ is the son of God; Satan knows that Jesus Christ is the son of God

In the last week I read an article, in one of the many online newsletters I subscribe to, about the need for the sinner’s prayer. The article says “The word “believe” means to trust. Acknowledging that I am a sinner, I must come to God recognizing that his son took the punishment for my sins and rose again, and trust in Christ alone to save me.”

Our belief needs to go beyond who Jesus is to what He has done for us, because we couldn’t do it for ourselves. Most of those who witnessed the raising of Lazarus would never forget it; the Bible says they believed in Jesus. They believed that Jesus had power, they believed that Jesus could raise someone from the dead, but they walked away because they could not believe that this person who could raise someone from the dead was, and is, the son of God, and that his death was necessary for their salvation. Because they could not see beyond their belief in their traditions and believed that the fulfilment of the law was all that was need for them to be saved.

The writer of the article went on to say, “A person who deeply impacted my life with the clarity of the Gospel said, ‘The message behind the Gospel is: “Be satisfied with the thing that satisfies God.”’

Only when I am satisfied that his Son’s death and that death *alone* accomplished my salvation, am I eternally His. Only when we acknowledge to God, ‘if you cannot take me to heaven, I am going to hell. You and you alone are my only way to eternal life.’ only then have we grasped the truth of what Jesus has done for us, then we are as certain of heaven as though we are already there.’

And Paul is saying to some in the church in Rome, you haven’t got it have you? You’ve heard the gospel and you say you believe and you’re going through the motions of that belief, in your mind you believe but your life does not bear witness, your life is not producing fruit and “letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death”, that’s quite unequivocal. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace. For the sinful nature is always hostile to God. It never did obey God’s laws, and it never will. That’s why those who are still under the control of their sinful nature can never please God.” (Romans 8:7 NLT)

Paul isn’t speaking to everyone but Paul knows that God will convict the ones who need convicting, and to the other he says, “But you are not controlled by your sinful nature. You are controlled by the Spirit if you have the Spirit of God living in you. And Christ lives within you, so even though your body will die because of sin, the Spirit gives you life because you have been made right with God. The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus

from the dead, he will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you.” Romans 8:9-11 NLT)

Remember it’s also the same Spirit who breathed life into those dry bones in our reading from Ezekiel, the same Spirit who wants to breathe life into the people we love and care for, the Spirit who wants to make Jesus known in the world, that’s the Spirit in us.

But within that, in verse nine, there is a very telling phrase which our Bible translators have put in brackets, another reminder, Paul says “(And remember that those who do not have the Spirit of Christ living in them do not belong to him at all.)” (Romans 8:9 NLT) The NIV says “And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.” (Romans 8:9 NIV)

Now before anyone gets the wrong idea here, I do not believe Paul is talking of the baptism of the Spirit, Paul is not talking of any special anointing or expression of the gifts, but of that Spirit of Christ that we get when we first believe. And what Paul is saying, is are you sure you’ve believed? Are you sure you know what you’ve believed? Are you sure that what you have believed is what God wants you to believe, and not what you have wanted to believe?

Without Jesus, without His spirit in us, we’re going to hell, and if you want to know what that is like, look it up in the Bible. We like to shy away from the uncomfortable, we don’t like to think that God will allow people to suffer, but Jesus talks of the fire of hell; actually he mentions the unquenchable fire of hell.

You know sometimes I worry, I worry that I stand here and mention hell and no one bats an eye lid, do you realise how scary that is? There is a whole world out there where people are going to hell and we have a message that can save them from that fate and we are not getting it across

Those of you who were here last week might remember that our gospel reading was John 9:1-41, it is the story of Jesus healing the man who had been born blind. And the Pharisees are trying to dispute the healing, claiming some trick, and Jesus calls them blind. And in verse 41 of that passage Jesus says, “If you were blind, you wouldn’t be guilty, But you remain guilty because you claim you can see.” (John 9:41 NLT) and to me, that is such a scary statement. “you remain guilty because you claim you can see”. In our case, “you remain guilty because you claim you believe in me, you remain guilty because in spite of that claim your life does not bear witness, your actions do not bear witness, your words do not bear witness, your lack of love, your lack of passion for a world that’s going to hell, do not bear witness to my Spirit living in you.”

I know that many of us here are parents and as parents we will often do anything that we need to for our children, and though it is always nice to have that acknowledged, it wouldn’t stop us doing any of those things just because they are not. But I am sure that if we did something for all our children and entrusted one of them to tell the others, and they didn’t we would be really upset, and the more important that information was, the more upset we would be.

Our father loved us so much that He sent Jesus to die for us for all of us, for the whole world. We read John 3:16 so often don’t we? And we personalise it, “God so loved Fidel etc., and God so loved everyone here, But God so loved the world, and He told Fidel to tell the world and he told all of us to tell the world, not just with words but with our lives, but when I look around me at the world that is going to hell I have to ask myself, what must my Father be thinking of me?

I read the story of a family that went fishing one day, The father was busy watching the rods while his two sons, a 12-year old and a 3-year old were down playing along the dock. The 12 year old was supposed to be watching his little brother, but he got distracted, and the 3 year old, named Billy, thought that would be a good time to see if he could reach the bottom of the water, so he stretched his little arm down into the water, and then just a little further. And he lost his balance and fell into the water, which was about 5 or 6 ft deep.

The splash alerted the 12-yr old who screamed for help and Dad came running from the end of the pier, jumped into the water and swam down, but was unable to see anything, he came up for air. Sick with panic, and went right back down into the murky water, and began to feel everywhere around the bottom. He couldn’t feel anything and had to come up for air again.

On his way up, he felt little Billy's arms locked in a death grip on one of the posts of the dock, about 4 ft under the water. Prying the boy's fingers loose, they broke the surface of the water and filled their lungs with air. After 5 minutes of holding onto him, when he managed to stop crying, and his nerves had calmed down a little bit, the dad asked his son, "What on earth were you doing down there? Why were you hanging onto the post so far under the water?" And little Billy with that sincerity, in the matter of fact way, only a 3 year old can, said "I was just waiting for you daddy. I knew you would for me and I was just waiting for you."

When we meet in church, we celebrate that 2000 years ago, the God of the universe, the creator of heaven and earth, of everything that is, that ever has been and ever will be, left the glory and the splendour of heaven, a place where there was no pain and no sickness, no accidents, no hurt, and no death. And plunged into this dark, gloomy world on a rescue mission, a rescue mission for all of us who were drowning, a rescue mission for all of us who were barely hanging on, a rescue mission for all of us who were lost in the darkness. And having rescued us He has said "now you go and rescue others." and what are we doing with that instruction?

Today it's Election Day in Spain, people are voting for their next Government. Some will be voting based on past experiences, some will be voting on personalities, some will have read the manifestos, and will be casting their votes based on what the various politicians have promised, and no doubt they will chose the party which they think will give them the best deal.

And here we are we have been commissioned to extend God's offer of life, His manifesto as it where. Lets remind ourselves what that manifesto is. It is the same one that Jesus proclaimed when He stood up in the synagogue and took the scroll of Isaiah and read, "The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, (Luke 4:18 NLT) and you know this manifesto isn't just for now, it isn't until the next election, it's for eternity.

That's the manifesto which Jesus has left us, and He's left the same Spirit in us that was in Him, it's a great manifesto, it's a far better manifesto than the one that satan offers. All he can offer is short lived pleasure and an eternity in hell. God offers us freedom and an eternity in heaven, not a difficult choice is it?

The trouble is that like any manifesto those who hear it measure it against the reality of the one offering it and they can be tainted by the ones who are proffering them, who are offering them. It doesn't matter how much a politician offers, if his life does not exude the honesty and the integrity that is necessary then people will see through him or her. And the same is true with us, at the end of the day it doesn't matter what manifesto we present on God's behalf, if our lives do not reflect the reality of what we are proclaiming then people will discard the offer of life and will continue to accept satan's offer which leads to death, and I have to ask myself daily, can I live with that? The answer is I can't, I can't, and if sometimes I get a bit impatient, if sometimes I get a bit passionate, it's because I can't, I can't live with the reality that we have been given a lifeline for the world and we are not using it to the best that we can. Which is why I have determined to live for God, and before anyone asks, no it's not easy, it's not an easy option, nothing that we do for God is ever going to be easy, there are no easy decisions. And once the decision is taken it's not easy to keep to, because anything and everything will pull as away. It's why Lent is, I believe, such an important time, such a special time. I think it's important that we go back year after year with Jesus to Gethsemane, and sit in that garden, and remember, the apostles who were with Jesus fell asleep. And we see Him bleed sweat and blood as he considers the way forward. I think it is important for all of us to go there and ask ourselves what God is calling us to do with our lives.

You know when Mel Gibson made that film a couple of years ago, he didn't call it the walk of Christ, he didn't call it the ramble of Christ, he didn't even call it the suffering of Christ or the sacrifice of Christ, he called it the passion of the Christ, because that is what Jesus showed for us passion, and I sometimes despair that we don't have that passion in our lives for Him.

Where is that passion that took Jesus to the cross in our lives? When I look at the cross, living for Him is the only decision that I can justifiably take.

You know we do read John 3:16 and we remind ourselves that John wrote “For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16 NLT) and that’s fantastic. Those of you who were here last Sunday night and heard Stephane speak might remember how she was encouraging us to walk that extra mile, to go round that extra corner, because there is more than John 3:16, more that God has and wants for us. And that same John earlier in verse 12 of chapter 1, before he comes to John 3:16, has clarified, has distilled this, because he wrote “Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12 NLT)

And I have to ask you this morning are you prepared to just be those who believe in Jesus or do you want to be counted as a child of God? Are you prepared to be among those who just do church, or do we really want to be the church of God in this place. And if we do then can I suggest that we need to capture that passion that Jesus has, that we need to capture that passion that took Jesus to the cross, that we need to harness that Spirit that He has placed in us, to take His Gospel to a world that is going to hell. Go to Gethsemane, kneel at Gethsemane, stay awake at Gethsemane, and allow God to speak into your lives today.