

Oct 23, 2011 Mark 16:15,16 also Apostles creed

## WHAT DO WE BELIEVE?

There is a country western song that has a line in it that goes something like this: “You got to stand for something or you’ll fall for anything.” You know that is true in life as well as in our faith. You got to know what you believe and why you believe. Paul wrote to Timothy these words concerning his belief in Jesus as his savior and savior of the world: *“I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed and am convinced he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.”* Again Paul writes to the newly founded church in Rome these words: *“I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. First the Jew, then the Gentiles.”* I know I have said this before, and perhaps I will again. Contrary to others, it does matter what you believe. A chorus of a hymn in an old hymnal states, *“I know Whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I’ve committed unto him against that day.”*

Last week Rev. Paul Sims read from John’s Gospel the verses surrounding and following John 3:16. We know what that says, that God so loved the world that he gave us his son so that whoever would, what, BELIEVE in him, would have eternal life. That’s a powerful bit of Scripture. Years ago Jim Jones thought he was God. He even got his people to believe he was their savior. And this led to what we know as the Jonestown suicides where he and his followers took poison to go on to what he proclaimed a better life. He had lost his way and he took many people with him who believed in him, rather than believing in our God. Or we learn from other cults that state their believes which often misuse the Scriptures. You got to know what you believe if you don’t want to fall for stuff you might later come to realize is false teachings. Years ago there were all kinds of cults trying to get young people to join them. They witnessed in airports and malls and wherever young kids were. In a time of unrest their message sounded great, but again, many became brainwashed into believing and

supporting with their money. Anyone can hold up a Bible and say they believe in it, or they can pick and chose what they want it to say or try to question some of it or all of it. Scripture teaches us that even the devil and his cohorts believe in Jesus and that is why they try as hard as they can to trick people into believing only half truths.

In the early church they struggled on what to believe. There was so many diverse statements of faith that no one seemed to be able to figure out what to believe. Then a group of people decided they needed to form a belief statement in order that the Christian world could know what they believed. That is how we got the statement of faiths we have today such as the Nicene Creed and the Apostles' Creed.

If we are going to do what Jesus said to do, that is *“to go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned”* then we best know what we believe. If someone confronts us about what we believe we best be able to tell them what and why we believe it. It should never be just some preacher said it. It shouldn't be that this is what some church doctrine says. It should be this is what God's word says and we believe it. John Wesley said we need to measure what we believe with four things. First, what does the Bible say? Second by reason, does it make sense? Third by experience, have we seen what the good news has accomplished in the past, in the early church and beyond? Fourth by the traditions of the early church, what did they believe and how did it transform their lives?

One must know what the good news is and what they believe. And when I was thinking about the sermons I heard while on vacation I thought how important the message is. One message was on praying, the other about going and sharing the good news. God's messages are life changing for those who listen and believe. The church gathers to praise God and to learn what his word says so that we can apply it in our lives. It's not a feel

good thing for the ills of today. It gives hope to the hopeless. It gives strength to those who struggle. It gives peace to those whose lives are in turmoil. Jesus said 'he had come to give life, a more abundant life to those who would believe and trust in him.' It's a live changing thing that should help people deal with their own situations and know that the God of yesterday is still the God of today and will be the God of our tomorrows. That's why we need to know about him, in order to know him personally so that we can trust in him always.

I'm still reading in the Old Testament these days and am finally in Kings. I'll tell you this, God was pretty strict with his people, even such greats as King Saul, King David, King Solomon and the rest of the crew. But hey, he was with Abraham, Jacob, Moses and the those he called out of bondage and led to the Promised Land. It was not an easy journey. And those who failed to believe, well, they lost out. Those who believed did find what God said, he delivered. God told them to follow his ways or else. And they faced the "or else" when they turned from walking hand in hand with God, following his rules and regulations. That period of time was a tough time for God's people. Some were led astray by the false words of preachers and kings. They worshiped all kinds of gods and goddesses. Their world began to fall apart all because they had strayed from the faith. Reading and thinking of our world today it almost seems like we haven't learned much from history. Many are still falling into the trap of believing the latest fad, or not believing at all. People aren't flocking to the nearest church every Sunday to hear God's word of transformation. Church isn't important to some. They say they believe in God, but that belief is not necessarily walking in his ways. If it was, then this world would be a far, far better world. It looks like the church has failed at times. But then you see God's hand upon someone and a revival comes about, a return to God seems to happen. Sometimes it lasts a long time. But then there are times that revivals are short lived. Look at churches that close because not many attend them. Yet you can find churches that are adding on because they are growing by leaps and bounds. What makes the difference? Not sure. But I can tell you this, the growing churches must be preaching Jesus and meeting the needs of the people.

A popular song years ago was called “I believe” and made famous by Frankie Lane. It goes like this:

## I Believe

I believe for every drop of rain that falls, a  
flower grows. And I believe that somewhere in the  
darkest night a candle glows. I believe for everyone  
who goes astray Someone will come to show the  
way

Yes I believe, oh I believe.

I believe above the storm the smallest prayer will  
still be heard. I believe that someone in the great  
somewhere hears every word. Every time I hear a  
newborn baby cry Or touch a leaf or see the sky  
Then I know why I believe, Oh I believe.

What do we believe today? A farmer believes when he plants those little seeds in the ground one day he will have a field full of corn or soy beans. Someone who plants flowers in the ground believes it won't be long until they produce great flowers to brighten up their world. Christians believe when life on this earth is over then we will enter heaven and receive our crown and see our loved ones again. We believe that God is still in charge. Those are just a few examples and there are lots more. Songs have been written about believing. Scripture is full of believing words. Believing is believing in something or someone in order to hold on when things get tough. For Christians it is our faith in Jesus Christ.

I want you to turn to the front of your bulletin this morning and let's read together the Apostles' Creed, a statement of our faith that comes from the founding fathers of our faith. It is the creed, or statement of faith that was used in the early church for those who were being baptized into the Christian faith. It is acknowledging with their mouths that which lives in their hearts.

*I believe in God the Father almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ his Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; for thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins. The resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.*

That my friends, is the statement of faith for all of Christianity held forth by all denominations. That is the standard by which we measure our believes. It begins by acknowledging who God is, creator of all things. It goes on to state our believes that Jesus was God's son, conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pilate, was then crucified, died and was buried. We also believe on the third day he arose from the grave and sits at the right hand of God the Father where he shall judge both the living and the dead. We also believe in the universal church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of our own bodies, and eternal life is waiting all who believe. This creed is based upon what the Bible says and what the early church believed.

I had a pastor friend who said that one of his members told him he could never say the creeds of our faith because he didn't believe in them. Can't remember what happened, but today I might just tell that person some

words Wesley heard. Say the creed until you believe every word of them. And then say the creeds with enthusiasm because you believe every word.

You really have to know what you believe or you will fall for anything. God knows that. Satan knows that too. He would like you to believe in half-truths, you know those truths that sound so good. Those half truths that say that God loves you and doesn't want to lose you so go ahead and do what you want because God understands. But he forgets to tell you it becomes your choice to believe and live as a Christian, or not to believe and do your own thing perhaps leading to eternal damnation. We hear things today that tell us things we like to hear but we also know if it sounds too good to be true, well, it perhaps might not be true. Even in advertisement there is some truth to things, but when you often read the fine print the product might not be what you think it is.

Believing! Jesus tells us that those who believe in him will find salvation. That's a fact. But that believing isn't just knowing about him, but knowing him in a personal way. It's believing enough to trust him and follow his ways. Many heard him preach, yet not all followed. They liked what they heard and what Jesus did, but that wasn't good enough for them to make a commitment to follow him. It's like anyone who is in sports or trying to lose weight. It's tough. But if you stick to it the results will amaze you. I haven't watched some of those reality shows on TV about those trying to lose lots of weight, but when they show the adds about them you see the struggles and failures they go through. But their trainers believe in them and believe they can help them to lose weight and have a better life. Isn't that the message of the Bible? God offers a better life to those who believe in him and stick with it.

So what do we believe? Do we believe in God who created all things? Do we believe that Jesus is his Son who came to earth to show us his Father's love and offer us a better way of living? Do we believe in the Virgin

birth? Do we believe that he suffered at the hands of Pilate and the Roman soldiers? Most importantly, do we believe he died on the cross? Do we believe he spent 3 days in the tomb? And do we believe beyond a shadow of a doubt that when the women went to anoint him after the 3 days they found the tomb empty not because some stole his body but because he had risen? Do we believe the disciples saw him after the resurrection and that he appeared to many? Do we believe that he then ascended into heaven to be with his Father, yet he gave us the Holy Spirit who is Jesus living in us? Do we believe one day he will return? Do we believe he is preparing a place in heaven for all who believe in him? Do we believe that he took the sins of the whole world upon himself so that we would not have to suffer for them? Do we believe God loved us so much that he sent his son to die that cruel death in order for us to find salvation?

I hope we believe that and much more about our loving God. These things we need to believe because they are the foundation of our faith.

When one joins the United Methodist Church they are asked about these same beliefs. They aren't just words to be taken lightly.

My friends, in times like these, we best know what we believe because there is so much junk out there vying for your attention. Not all of it good. So measure it all by God's word and what you believe.

I believe in miracles.....because I believe in God and he transformed my life. And if God said it, then it's good enough for me!