

I Believe

1 Corinthians 8:5-6

Welcome! I've missed you all - and it is excellent to meet some new people here now that we are in Epsom and Cheam. If you are joining me today, please drop me a message on the live chat, the comments on YouTube or by other means afterwards... We will form community here on Sundays during the premiere and keep working towards being together in COVID-secure ways as appropriate. My vision is to keep appearing on my YouTube channel anyway - so do log in and subscribe, hit the bell, like and share so that you are kept notified when there's new content. It doesn't cost anything to subscribe and you can always ask a younger member of your family to show you how to do this ... I know I did.

Over the coming weeks, we will look at the creed, as agreed by Ecumenical Churches and has a historic context on which our Christian faith is based... But today, we will begin simply... we believe...

Some of our beliefs are good and right and based on solid teaching, proper evaluation and experience...

Such as; "I believe if we want a good Yorkshire pudding, we should use plain flour to get them to rise"

It feels counter intuitive - but it is right! If I were to say, but Self-Raising flour is what makes things rise in the oven, that would be right - but also wrong regarding Yorkshire puddings...

So our experience and knowledge needs a proper context for our beliefs and as Christians, we find this in the Word of God - the Bible, in the looking at and learning the whole picture of God and his covenant love made complete in Jesus and his death on the cross and resurrection. We read the experiences of the people who have gone before us, some of whom have worked out difficult passages of the Bible in the face of personal difficulties or situations. John Wesley would be one such person that Methodists might think of and there are others from the early church Fathers to Luther to people whose biographies inspire us as, with nothing but their belief in God have done amazing things - Hudson Taylor, Gladys Aylward, Jackie Pullinger to name a few. Belief in God who is invisible and yet so powerful is arguably counter to much that those who don't have a Christian faith hold dear.

It is also our own experience of God that shapes our belief, and here we have to be careful that we place our faith in the true and living God and not a reconstruction in our own image. Which is why, over the coming weeks, we will be looking and learning the Creed. So we can confidently say "I believe" and have thoroughly explored the weight of the assertions in the creed.

To those of you whom I am just getting to know - over in Cheam and down in Epsom, me saying "I believe" requires some context... Christians often call this account of faith our 'testimony' - telling the truth to the best of our understanding about our love for God through Jesus Christ our lord and Saviour. I love the succinct way by which Paul sets out his own credal statement here in 1 Corinthians 8: 6

"Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live."

At the very core of belief is life. The source and means of life. It isn't as though we are literally dead without belief, because the first part of the statement remains true - God the Father is the one from whom we came... but the second part of the sentence is heavily reliant on the second assertion...

We come into a position of living for God when we choose to approach him through the Lord Jesus Christ. Life given by God and life through Jesus causes us to live for God.

So, how did I come to a position of believing? Was it something I grew up into in the days of Sunday Schools and Scripture Exams? Yes - and also no... Methodist Churches in rural and coastal North Yorkshire where I grew up in the 80s had entered a spiritually dry patch. I was there when one Sunday, suddenly there were no children in Church. I graduated to Church services and learned about apple cores and fairy liquid bottles but heard little of Jesus. Yet, remaining at the front of Church was a stained glass window which held the scripture; "we preach Christ and him crucified" - being a critical sort of person I began to weigh the words of the preacher and the dullness of the services against those words of scripture. They didn't add up...

So I was ready for a challenge to the emptiness of religion that would either debunk it forever or show me something more. It was a school friend who needed a christian to go with her to a Band of Hope Youth Camp who was the first to open the door of faith and allowed opportunity for Jesus to speak to me, simply and straightforwardly and I knew that the God I knew about was my Saviour in Jesus. He called me to him and I came. Transformed by the cross whereby I could enter the presence of God. A life transformed, sometimes daily so that I become more Jesus-like in every aspect and so able to live for God who made me in his image. I was 16 and the challenge of the "we preach Christ crucified" scripture was still challenging me. If it was true, and my experience and the Bible told me that it is, then I had to take it up and do it rather than complaining - regularly and to the Superintendent that the services were poor and the sermons terrible.

We had hosted Village '87 in Fylingthorpe that summer, which had given me a chance to confirm my decision to follow Jesus and to delve more fully into the Bible, to set up a Youth Group and to press on into faith. I heard God clearly call me to ministry and preaching in Camber Sands at Easter People in 1988 - "you will be my preacher and my minister."

So I believe because God changed the inky words on the page into Words that transformed me and gave me life. I believe because God has been faithful and faithfully with me in every area of my life. I believe because there is a quickening in my heart when I see God's purposes being taken on by the Church - prophetic moments of Kairos when the living for God really comes into play. The long-suffering Superintendent -now with the saints in glory - asked me if I was sure I wasn't called to teach Sunday school in my conversation about becoming a preacher... I don't think there's anything else he could have said that would have made me more convinced in the call to Preach. God is still my goal as well as the originator of my being... and I get closer to him through Jesus who makes a way.

I have many stories to tell - stories of faith, in joy and pain. Stories of failure and stories of winning well! But they all have their source in God.

I believe. And I have to believe in the right stuff, or it's just false hope.

I believe. And it has to be tested and proved with scripture and history.

I believe. And it transforms me, every single day. Not in exempting me from life's ups and downs, but by offering strength that is not me own and courage that could only come from one who is greater than I...

So as Paul lays his credal statements out in 1 Corinthians 8, we will lay them out over the next few weeks. They are not “Methodist” they were written long before “evangelical” “radical” or “liberal” became labels that Christians chose to wear as badges to mark out their differences. The historic creeds belong to The Church, and it is as The Church that we will get to know God better - through the body of Jesus and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Prayers

You will get to know me a little bit during these videos, and I would love to get to know you - so do pop into Roots at Epsom Methodist Church with a couple of friends for a socially distanced cup of tea and see me there. We are COVID-secure. We are also looking at ways of bringing bite-sized church to you so that we may worship under the same roof - but these videos will be available each week if you need them. I will post the script on catherinehutton.com in case you wish to pass it on to a non-tech friend or neighbour.

God loves you in Jesus Christ. I believe he has a purpose for our churches and a desire to be known in our communities. We have Good News to Share and that is our belief that life is better, changed and transformed when we allow Jesus to love us, heal us and bring us to God.