

## Doubt and belief

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing to you, Holy One. Amen.

When I was first coming back to the church as an adult I went through several adult formation and education classes in a few different denominations and spiritual practice communities.

I remember sitting in one session, which was all about the different practices of meaning in the communities we were coming from. It was not in a Christian church, but most of the folks there used to worship in Christian communities and identified as Christians.

Someone who had been a part of the Catholic Church began by describing the Eucharist and what it meant for them. Immediately, someone in the group responded with “Eww, that’s weird”. Someone else jumped in to say something that has stayed with me since.

“Wait...we shouldn’t yuck someone’s yum. Truly, Jesus was the definition of weird in our modern context. He was asking his disciples to love people who were supposed to be their enemies, pay more attention to those in need than to one’s own need to fit societal standards.

Jesus was calling his disciples into a perpetual state of being weird according to social norms and standards.

So, until we create a society where loving one another, centering those on the margins and those Jesus preached about become the norm, we as followers of Christ will just be weird.”

It was then I knew I could re-examine Christianity as a community of faith. Clearly, this person knew something about Jesus that I didn't. It would be the start of a beautiful journey back home to The Episcopal Church.

In our Gospel for today, we encounter

The conclusion of our Bread of Life discourse. Thus far in this discourse, Jesus has been laying out what it means to believe. To know Jesus in increasingly intimate ways. As we heard last week, this call is an indwelling of the spirit and a knowing that Christ is in us, and we are in Christ through the eating and drinking of Christ's body and blood. Now, if we pause to reflect on what we heard last week and what we hear this week, it isn't unreasonable that there were folks who looked at each other and said, whoa, this is just a little too weird for us. I think it's time to go home.

Jesus knew of their doubt, too he says: “ But among you, there are some that do not believe”. Our text reminds us that Jesus knew who would betray him from the beginning. Yet he continues letting the disciples choose for themselves who will continue and who will return to their homes.

We have the benefit of time, the resurrection, and context to help us better see what Jesus was asking of us and his followers. They were trying to process everything in real-time. Watching as those around them walked away.

Jesus continues questioning his disciples, asking, “Do you also wish to go home?” Peter’s response of “Lord to whom can we go” is about their belief. As Peter says, they have come to believe, so where would they go now? This is the depth of their belief. Of course there were other things they could do. They could go back to their lives or possibly make new ones, but for them, truly, there was no life outside the one they had found in following Jesus. This was the depth of their commitment, their belief in the Son of man, Jesus.

One of the commentaries I use in preparing my sermons reminded me that while faith is a central concept in John’s Gospel, it is conveyed through the verb believe, which John

often expresses in active ways. Showing up as “believe in him”(vv 6:29, 40, 3:16) or “believe in me” (6: 35).

In John’s Gospel, to believe in Jesus is to accept the incarnate Jesus, the Word made flesh who then lived among us (1:14). “Then through the death of this Lamb of God the sin of the world was taken away”(1:29)<sup>1</sup>.

When I encountered the spiritual group I opened my sermon with, I wasn’t quite sure what I was searching for at the time. When the woman spoke up about her understanding of Jesus, it opened my heart to a new understanding of his teachings. I heard the Gospel in a new light after that. She said the thing out loud that I was always afraid to say.

This stuff is really weird sometimes. So, what do I do with that? What might we do with that?

The answers I found to that question over time have been surprising.

I’ve learned that sometimes the best questions are left unanswered or lead us to better questions.

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<sup>1</sup> Bartlett and Taylor, *Feasting on the Word. Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary*.

Sometimes, the weird stuff leads us to deeper spiritual understandings because, let's face it, we're all a little on the weird side.

Sometimes to believe isn't about having all the answers; sometimes, it is simply faith in action. To move forward in faith.

I've seen countless examples of belief in this congregation over the last two years.

As we have navigated, me joining your community, the transition to learning to lead on your own, and now the preparation of welcoming in a new priest.

Truly, that's who and where we are called to be.

A community and people where we are trying to be more fully authentically ourselves, who God lovingly created us to be. A beautiful, strong community of God's beloved children.

As I've walked alongside all of you over the last two years, I've been truly blessed to learn from you and grow alongside you. To see your belief in action.

To bear witness to your strength as a people bound together by a common belief in the love of God, lived out through

unconditional hospitality and truly abundant love for one another and those you serve.

While this is not my last Sunday with you, it is most likely my last sermon with you, for now anyway, so I wanted to take a little preacher privilege to leave you with what I feel the message of the text is and who we are called to be.

It is a little weird, unfortunately, in our modern times to be the kind of Christian who goes in peace to love and serve God.

Who loves our neighbor without condition and truly works to live the teachings of Jesus outside these walls.

Knowing that God is walking alongside us calling us to share a life of love, hope, and peace with each other and our neighbors.

So, live boldly. Love deeply, Hope without end.

Always knowing that in those hopes, in our fears and doubts, we are deeply loved by God. **Amen**

Full Reference for material on p.23

Bartlett, David Lyon, and Barbara Brown Taylor, eds. *Feasting on the Word. Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary*. 1st ed. Vol. 3. Year B. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008.