

“BELIEVE THE UNBELIEVABLE - AGAIN”

Isaiah 6:1-13; Psalm 138; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; Luke 5:1-11

Introduction

First, thanks for the privilege of considering together what God has to say to us this morning. I've wanted to have a chance to preach in our family chapels, and took this opportunity when the schedule changed.

Now, you need to know my wanting to preach is not like those kinds of offers that pastors get from time to time. You know what I mean: “Pastor, the Lord’s laid a message on my heart for our church. So if you ever need someone to preach for you, just let me know. I’ll be glad to help.” ;-(

This is not one of those sermons! Our message today comes from the lectionary readings for this week. So, no hidden agenda on my part. Just an attempt to hear what God has to say to us today.

Move #1

We’ve read the four texts for this week. Each of them give witness to God’s grace, each tell of one of the amazing things He has done.

In Isaiah’s account, God reveals Himself to the prophet:

- Calls him
- Cleanses him
- Commissions him
- All in extraordinary ways.

In the psalm of David, the psalmist:

- Praises God for working on his behalf
- Prophecies that the kings of the earth will do the same
- Proclaims that God will continue to keep and deliver him

In his letter to the church at Corinth, the apostle Paul:

- Reviews the essentials of the Christian faith
- Reminds the Corinthians of the corroborating witnesses
- Recounts how he has responded to what he's just told them

In Luke's gospel, we read a story about one of the times when Jesus went fishing:

- Jesus went fishing by teaching the crowds who had gathered to hear him and learn from him.
- Jesus went fishing by telling Peter, James, and John where the fish were waiting for them that day
- Jesus went fishing by inviting those fisherman to join him in a new kind of fishing expedition

Nothing new here, though, really. Just some old, familiar Sunday School stories about some unbelievable things God did back then.

Hmmm . . .

Move #2

Do you remember what it was like when you first heard those stories?

Weren't we:

- Blown away by the vision of Isaiah
- Amazed by God's faithfulness in the psalms
- Astonished by Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and all those who said it was so
- Awed by Jesus' miracle with the fish and then his miracle with the disciples

But that was then and this is now. Those stories don't seem to mean much to us anymore. It could be that:

- We're less moved by these accounts because they're so familiar to us. "What's new?"
- We're less impressed by these stories because it's been a long since Sunday School. "We've moved on since then."
- We're less likely to be awed by them because between then and now things have not gone the way we expected them to go . . .
- . . . the realities we've experienced have challenged our ability, our willingness to believe the unbelievable.

So, today I think God is speaking to us through each of these passages, He's calling to us through each of these stories, He's saying: "Believe the unbelievable - again."

- Believe that God revealed himself to Isaiah, cleansed Isaiah's sins, called Isaiah to go for Him and Isaiah said, "Yes."
- Believe that God answered David's prayers, was worthy of David's praise, and kept David close in the midst of his trials.

- Believe that Christ died for our sins, was buried, was raised on the third day, appeared to Peter, the disciples, 500 others, ascended to Heaven, and then appeared to Paul.
- Believe that Jesus helped the disciples find the fish they were looking for that day in such a way that they left their nets and their boats, and followed Him.

Believe the unbelievable - again!

Move #3

However, to do so is to do more than just acknowledge these events as historical facts, it is to do more than just accept that what the Bible says is true . . .

To believe the unbelievable again requires us to move beyond intellectual assent, to get past theological dogma. It means we'll embrace with our hearts the God who reveals himself through these written witnesses.

In fact, that is what the word "believe" originally meant. The word we use to describe what we do with our heads originally described something that people did with their hearts.

Our word "believe" has its origins in the Old High German and Old English words that meant: "to hold dear, to love; to give one's heart to." Originally, the word "believe" meant to "be-love."¹

¹ Originally introduced to this at a presentation given by Marcus Borg.
Verified via: <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?search=believe&searchmode=none> and <http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/believe>

You see, if we are ever going to really believe the unbelievable again, we will have to “be-love” the One who is revealed in these stories. We will have to give our hearts to the God who reveals himself to us through them - just like we did the first time we heard them.

Truth is, though:

- It’s always more of a challenge the second time around.
- It always takes more trust, more faith, more grace to believe the unbelievable - again.

But the God who made our believing possible the first time will make it possible this time too - if we’ll let him.

Doing so means surrendering to God all the reasons we have to keep from believing, all the reasons we hold on that keep us from be-loving Him - again. All of the reasons have to go - all of them have to be given back to Him.

Personal remarks . . .



[Picture of Lady Lake Church of God worshipping in the ruins of their demolished sanctuary.
Source: New York Times, February 5, 2007]

Move #4

There's one more point that's raised for our consideration in these four passages.

That point is not that if we believe the unbelievable, then God will do something for us.

The point is that if we believe the unbelievable, we will do something for Him.

Let's review the texts one more time:

- After the vision and the cleansing, Isaiah says, "Here am I - send me," even though his assignment was the first "Mission: Impossible."
- Having seen God work in the past, David trusted God with his future, in spite of the trouble he went through.

- Paul's life says it all, his travels and teaching and writing and suffering prove he "be-loved" the Christ who lived, died, and lives again.
- Peter, James, and John - brought their boats ashore, left the nets - and the fish in the nets - behind, and they followed Jesus until the end of their days.

On the first day of my first class of Christian theology at Nazarene Theological Seminary, my professor, Dr. Kenneth Grider, stood in front of the class and declared:

"Theology wears overalls - beliefs we live by."

[Read notes from class]

Our believing the unbelievable again may mean we'll have to:

- stick our necks out like Isaiah
- trust more deeply in trials like David
- travel the world over like Paul
- change vocations like the disciples

It may be something dramatic like these stories, or something simple like living our everyday lives as though we be-love the God who first loved us.

For when we truly believe the unbelievable again, the patterns of our lives will change.

They will look less like us and more like God - the One who does the unbelievable, the One who wants us to give Him our hearts, the One who invites us to "be-love" in Him - again.