

BELIEVE GOD
Fourth Sunday of Easter
May 8, 2022



PLEASE NOTE, THERE WILL BE NO BULLETIN ON MAY 22.

***RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP:**

We gather once more as a great multitude
From various peoples and places, we've come
Blessing and glory, wisdom and thanksgiving
Honor and power be to our God
We gather once more to shout "Alleluia!"
Salvation belongs to the Holy One.
Blessing and glory, wisdom and thanksgiving

Honor and power be to our God

We gather to worship day and night
The one who guides us to the springs of life.

Blessing and glory, wisdom and thanksgiving

Honor and power be to our God

Revelation 7:9-16

***INVOCATION:**

God, our shepherd—Restorer of our souls—
The one who calls us to nap in green pastures—
We enter into this moment of worshipful gathering
trusting that you will guide us along the paths of
righteousness. Wherever we may be in this world,
let us know the comforting presence of your rod and
staff. We are expectant, O God, that our fears will
fade, that our cups will overflow, and that your
goodness and mercy will accompany us in this hour
and beyond. Now, let us worship you in spirit and in
truth. Amen.

***INVITATION TO CONFESSION:**

God, as you call us more intentionally into the
fullness of life that abounds in your presence, let us
acknowledge the ways our unbelief has separated us
from your vision for our lives and all creation.
Moment of silence

God, we confess that we often let hopelessness have too much power over our lives. In the face of crisis, our faith has frequently faltered. In the midst of calamity, our fearlessness has faded. In the presence of tribulation, our worry has weakened our ability to act justly. Help our unbelief, O God! Bring us back to you, Great Redeemer. Remind us of the unfailing treasure that is in your love and care for all of creation— For your grace is sufficient, from the valley of death to the tables you’ve prepared for us. Embolden us, again, and revive our spirits.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE:

Friends, hear the Good News: God believes in us even when our belief in God is challenged. God’s grace and mercy abounds, and in God and Christ, we are forgiven. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: Acts 9:36-43

³⁶ In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas). Her life overflowed with good works and compassionate acts on behalf of those in need. ³⁷ About that time, though, she became so ill that she died. After they washed her body, they laid her in an upstairs room. ³⁸ Since Lydda was near Joppa, when the disciples heard that Peter

was there, they sent two people to Peter. They urged, “Please come right away!” ³⁹ Peter went with them. Upon his arrival, he was taken to the upstairs room. All the widows stood beside him, crying as they showed the tunics and other clothing Dorcas made when she was alive.

⁴⁰ Peter sent everyone out of the room, then knelt and prayed. He turned to the body and said, “Tabitha, get up!” She opened her eyes, saw Peter, and sat up. ⁴¹ He gave her his hand and raised her up. Then he called God’s holy people, including the widows, and presented her alive to them. ⁴² The news spread throughout Joppa, and many put their faith in the Lord. ⁴³ Peter stayed for some time in Joppa with a certain tanner named Simon.

***GOSPEL LESSON: John 10:22-30**

²² The time came for the Festival of Dedication^[a] in Jerusalem. It was winter, ²³ and Jesus was in the temple, walking in the covered porch named for Solomon. ²⁴ The Jewish opposition circled around him and asked, “How long will you test our patience? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.”

²⁵ Jesus answered, “I have told you, but you don’t believe. The works I do in my Father’s name testify

about me, ²⁶ but you don't believe because you don't belong to my sheep. ²⁷ My sheep listen to my voice. I know them and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life. They will never die, and no one will snatch them from my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them from my Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one."

These are the ancient Words revealed to us anew.

Thanks be to God.

MESSAGE: "Believe God"

(Please notice that this scripture story is before Jesus was arrested, crucified, and resurrected.)

How do we come to believe something? What is our thought processes? Let's imagine a new family moves in next door to us. We've chatted with them some. The woman tells us all about her fabulous life up till now. She has lived all over the world. She has written several books on travel. Her mother's second husband was a prince in some middle east country. Do we believe her?

We look at her and notice she is well dressed and very stylish. We listen to her. Is her story possible? Yes. Are her stories consistent? Yes. Do

they sound logical? I suppose. But I think I would need some kind of proof before I trust her and believe her.

Today's scripture is all about belief according to the Gospel of John. It is still the Easter season, but Easter does not relieve the church of the task of engaging opposition and unbelief. There are still controversies between Jesus and various opponents. Several times in this section of the Gospel of John, Jesus is threatened with death on the charge of blasphemy. Even if that word is not mentioned, that is the issue because Jesus made himself equal to God. This death talk, though real, is not threatening to Jesus, because in this Gospel, no one takes Jesus' life; he gives it when his hour comes.

Friends, I have always assumed that all the Jews that surrounded Jesus or heard of his healings were or became followers and believed everything Jesus did or said. I was wrong. Sure, he fed lots of people but they probably only came for the free lunch. Yes, he healed many people, but there have been many magicians or healers who have come to this region and done the same thing. When Jesus talks about his interpretation of their laws from Moses, there are skeptics.

This particular passage has Jesus on the porch of the Temple in Jerusalem during the Feast of

Dedication. Already in this Gospel, Jesus' signs, speeches, and controversies have been presented as occurring on other feast days: Sabbath, Passover, and Tabernacles. In the theology presented by the author of the Gospel of John, Jesus fulfills and brings to an end Judaism with all its festivals and traditions. Although the followers of Jesus celebrate this understanding, opposition to it and to Jesus by those who hold dear these traditions is to be expected. *(Can you imagine having someone take away our celebrations such as Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, 4th of July, etc? I think we would have a problem with that.)*

It is also important to keep in mind that in this Gospel, the Jews are not only the Jews, but they represent "the world" that does not believe. Church history makes it abundantly clear that "the world" is inside as well as outside the circle of disciples. Our text addresses conditions within the church in which customs, places, traditions, and rituals are held so firmly that the total adequacy of Christ is obscured, if not denied.

In our story today, his questioners would not believe him, even if he told them the answers to their questions. They have witnessed Jesus' works, but they are unconvinced.

Friends, if we ever feel bad when doubts and lack of faith creep into our minds, don't feel alone. Not all the people around Jesus believed him either. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER: Beginning with a time for silent personal prayer.

Just and holy God, hear our intercessions at your mercy. We pray for all your people in the church that the faithful under the guidance of the Holy Spirit may advance in the teaching of Jesus and the way of the cross. We pray for all who make our laws and exercise authority over us as for the whole citizenry of our nation. May they lead with clarity and charity.

Hear our prayers for the distressed and those beset with difficulty, embittered by loss or deceived by false values, and for all who are shaken in faith or broken in spirit.

We pray for the sick and those worn down by chronic illness; for all who have been hurt by accident or are victims of violence. We especially pray for the people of the Ukraine who are the innocent victims of violence by oppression from other nations. We pray for all those affected by recent storms and tornadoes. May the kindness of others help with the recovery.

We pray for all those on our prayer list, that they may feel your loving arms around them.

Be with all of us in our day-to-day world, that we always remember to believe in God who gives us peace and many blessings.

THE LORD'S PRAYER: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

***BENEDICTION:**

Let us go forth knowing that we are led by God, that we are sheltered by God, that God never leaves nor forsakes us even in the bleakest valley. In God, may we hunger and thirst no more, and may a peace that surpasses all understanding abide with us, now and forever more. Amen.