

## Wesley United Methodist Church

April 27, 2014

“Blessed Are the Believers.”

John 20:19-31

Blessed are the believers. That’s true, you know. So often when we look at this important passage in John’s Gospel we focus on Thomas’ doubt and we say, “Yes, I can identify with that.” And we miss the punch line. We miss the important part. We miss the words of Jesus. Jesus said to Thomas, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen me and yet believe.”

Blessed are the believers. We are not talking about the smugly self-righteous or about the pious know-it-all’s who spout off answers to questions no one is even asking. We are talking about people who have come to grips with their doubts in an honest and forthright way and have made a commitment of their will to trust in the care and providence of God.

They are indeed the blessed of this earth. They are healthier, happier, and generally more effective in relating to others than are the doubters and cynics. It is they who move the world forward, for there is power in believing more power than the unbeliever can ever know. Part of that power is the power of vision for truly if seeing is believing, the converse is equally as true. Believing is seeing-seeing possibilities and promises that bode good fortune for all who perceive their presence. So, I say it again, blessed are the believers.

Of course we have our doubts. All of us do. Woody Allen is right. Faith would be easier if God would show himself by depositing a million dollars in a Swiss bank account in our name. Why can’t God do something like that for us? It would be easy. We can sympathize with British philosopher and mathematician Bertrand Russell who was once asked what he would say if after death he found himself confronted by God. Russell replied, “I shall say to him, ‘Why did you make the evidence of your existence so insufficient?’” There is a part of us that says with Thomas, “Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe.” We all long for certainty. But that is one gift that God has not granted us.

Undoubtedly, He has his reasons. If His aim is to produce mature spirits fit to spend eternity in His presence, it makes sense that he would not reveal Himself in His fullness to us. Such certainty would keep us forever immature. If a child knows that his father will always be there to solve every problem, resolve every crisis, comfort every sorrow, the child will never develop self-reliance. Our insecurity may be essential to spiritual growth. Besides, most of us have certainty enough. It is interesting how often the name of God slips out on the lips of even those officially committed to atheism.

Pope John Paul once said that he would never forget the impression left with him by a Russian soldier in 1945. The war was just over. A soldier knocked at the door of the Cracow seminary where John Paul was serving many years before his election to be Pope. When asked, “What do you want?” the soldier replied that he wished to enter the seminary. The conversation between the Russian soldier and the Polish priest went on for a long time. Even though the soldier never entered the seminary, and it was far from his understanding what seminary actually was, the meeting taught the young priest one great truth: how wonderfully God succeeds in penetrating the human mind even in extremely unfavorable conditions of denial of Him. In all of his adult life that soldier had never entered the inside of a church. At school, and then later at work, he had continually heard people asserting “There is no God.” And in spite of all that he said more than once: “But I always knew that God exists...and now I would like to learn something about him.”

That soldier believed the evidence in his own mind and heart. Living in the kind of world in which we find ourselves, it is easy to agree with the Psalmist: “The fool says in his heart there is no God.” 14:1

A British biologist wrote a book designated to further the cause of atheism. He says, “I took it for granted that the Christian faith was played out.” When, however, he saw that Christianity worked; that many eminent persons, some of the most illustrious in the fields of science, had ranged themselves on

the side of the Gospel, he resolved to let the Bible speak for itself. As a result he came to the conclusion that, 'everyone should be a Christian.' He said, "Unbelief is usually due to indolence, often to prejudice, and never a thing to be proud of."

This is not to say that faith is to be accepted without careful thought. God gave us minds to protect us from gullibility to every silly idea that comes down the pike. We need to closely examine every new idea to which we are exposed, whether it comes from a preacher, a politician, a professor, a news publication or a TV pundit. God does not honor gullibility. Nevertheless, we will never make much progress in life until that moment when we take our stand, until we resolve in our own mind what we do believe and to whom we are committed. Blessed are the believers. That's the first thing we need to see. Here is the second.

The believers, in turn, are a blessing. Where has there ever been a monument erected to the cynic, the critic, the doubter? As someone has said, "He who pulls on the oars has not time to rock the boat." Believers are those who know that the world can yet be a better place. Consider our own society. Who have been the builders? Who have constructed the hospitals, the great universities, the social service agencies? Behind every one you will find persons who hold in their hearts not cynicism but hope, not doubt but faith, not hostility but love.

Believers are people who know that if they make this a better place for their neighbors, they will also make it a better place for themselves. They have learned that the path to greatness is the road of service. In the soaring language of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr: "Everybody can be great because everybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your noun and verb agree to serve. You don't have to know Einstein's theory of relativity to serve. You only need a heart full of grace and a soul generated by love... When evil men plot, good men plan. When evil men bomb and burn, good men must build and bind. When evil men shout words of hatred, good men must commit themselves to the glory of love..."

Newscaster David Brinkley once put it like this, "A successful man is one who can lay a firm foundation with the bricks others have thrown at him."

Where are you this morning-on the side of the doubters or on the side of the believers? Anybody can be a doubting Thomas. It takes no particular strength of character to say, "Lest I put my fingers in his hands and his side, I will not believe." It does take strength of character to say, "I don't have all the answers. But I know who is making this world a better place to live. It is those who are followers of the Man from Galilee. And I want to make my stand with them! I don't have all the answers, but unless someone proves otherwise, I will take my stand with those who believe this beautiful world was a creation of a good and loving God. I don't have all the answers, but I believe that the death of Jesus Christ upon the cross of Calvary has somehow changed this world forever. I don't have all the answers, but put me down as a believer."

Listen again to the words of the Lord, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."