

A Sermon for Fellowship of the Valley
John 6:24-35

“This I Believe”

I believe, I believe....this I believe. You ever heard that little radio snippet on NPR called this I believe, I've only caught it a few times and read about it in one of my favorite books called the moviegoer and got a good chuckled out it. It's the common everyday listeners opportunity to become a philosopher and fathom the depths of knowledge. Usually, as could be expected people, make is sound good and high flutin' you might say. They talk about beauty, music, art, happiness, sometimes barbeque and who can blame them. I mean if we had to sum up what we believed in a 30 second sound bit it could be quite interesting right? What if someone really had some fun with it...this I believe...

Gas prices are too high and work is a drag, it's hot outside and I just want to take a nap and cool off...this I believe.

Or this I believe....the lefty liberals don't care about morals or the knot head conservatives need to loosen up....

Or snickers are better than granola....fried beats baked....vanilla...boy that's boring...

You see what's happening here....we believe lot's of different things...you've got your fried camp and your organic vegetarians and they really are different right?

You ever feel like you don't know what's up or down when it comes to what in the world are you to believe....there's no shortage of information for us....we can even get our news tailored to our preference...do we satire news, in your face news, or just the facts....who decides what in the world is true? Well of course you do right...this I believe....

we usually go through a process on this journey to belief right...we are all trained at this...2 plus 2 equals four....right....belief is to be tried, tested, experimented, proded, poked, broken down, analyzed, made symmetrical, divisible, predictable, probable, tired and true, whew!!! Challenged, changed evolved, relativized, re-measured, culturally contextualized, re-measured, subtracted, added...got it.... Once you've gone through the process.....you can then make your decision...you categorize....you decide...

We've been trained by the hand of modernity....its right there in the title, this "I" believe...we don't recognize the oddness of such a claim because we have been so well conditioned in a way that we decide based upon what evidence we have to believe....

Allow me if you will to belabor a point....the this I believe has been changed by the of modernity Rene Descartes....who basically sat around and decided he could doubt just about everything external.....but what he could not doubt was that he was doubting...thus the famous phrase... “I think therefore I am”....or rather...because I have rational thoughts and think the world now becomes real and knowledge of the world is shaped from the inside out and not the outside in.....you know the phrase, beauty is in the eye of the beholder....our friend Descartes would agree...and most of us as well because it’s how we’ve been trained to believe....

Allow me to say thank you Mr. Descartes for your all of your optimism that we could become masters and possessors of nature by the way of mathematics but allow me to call in my this I believe

This I believe.....

Belief is not thinking hard enough to solve a puzzle rather revelation of love that shapes us...do you see the difference...

Did you catch that little snippet in the Gospel reading where Jesus says the work of God is that you believe in him who he has sent? Seems really simple right....this I believe...

So belief is important...our believing is what Jesus says is our work....

And most of us who grew up in southern evangelical life...this really is at the heart of our story....there’s a strong emphasis on being a “strong” believer...have you heard people ask about people, “are they a believer”...well I don’t know what that means or what I’m supposed to answer....we’ll I’m sure they have a this I believe snippet.....so what do I say....of course I know what is meant....does this individual confess Jesus as Savior...do they believe in him who was sent? There it is right there right at the heart of being evangelical....Jesus said to believe....

So why all the fuss....why not just say believe and que the music....argue and convince you that Christianity is rational, and thus can be believed....

Many people really want to make matters of faith like this math equation....this focus on “thinking”....the bible said it I believe it right?...i mean it says it right there the work we are required to do is believe...so I believe...

Our belief often starts here, with the “mathematical” belief or you could call it a cognition or a formula....we think if we think about believing we believe...and this is not a bad place to start...and some people can stay there and believe there, and they are graced.....however, for some of us, it’s not so simple, we’ve got to question and let things settle and move in and out because life is not always mathematical is it....it comes along and things get fuzzy, foggy and dark, math equation theology doesn’t add up, hold water....you can’t make yourself believe it.... our heart and mind don’t always agree....you can think things that you know deep down are not true...so...when you’ve got no gas in the tank....the cliché is not what you need, its not what you want...you

want to really believe and know...and you are moved into the a knowledge that's not so certain not so clear....and anxiety levels raise, questions come and you may even say it's not true....but you don't know where else to go...and something pulls you back....you catch a glimpse of beauty and your heart lights up and you know there's something to believe....

It's like music...theory can be mathematical.....chord progressions follow a pattern 1, 4, 5, 2 so and so on...but outside of music theory class are you really concerned with mozart's mathematical theory or the beauty of how the music can move you....you ever heard a song that moved you...it brings you in, draws you into its is movement and you are there on its terms being moved by its beauty and value...if your really caught by the music your not thinking...you're hearing it somewhere else.....so is the movement of faith....there is thinking involved and we should not pretend as if theology does not matter...it is the opposite...our theology ought to include thinking as well as knowing...and as we hear music under our thinking ...it is with the journey of faith...it's a movement that draws us in....based upon God's own story...God's own character....and shapes us.....we do no more believe than we are moved to belief...God's grace always moves and draws....

So Jesus took bread and fish and multiplied it....and fed those who were hungry...and they were amazed....Jesus then retreated and they tracked him down and he told them...the work they were required was that they believe in him who he sent....they were more than likely amazed at the sign Jesus performed....and Jesus wanted them to know....that the bread of life fills them...and believing in him quenches thirst... that's what seems to be going on in these stories...it's not about the belief of those who ate the bread...it's rather about God's nature....God's provision...which in this story is not merely "spiritual" but always grounded and rooted in the material world...in bread...in the most elemental and fundamental of things...God's giving nutrition to the soul...through what is concrete...so we cannot abstract faith...and say physical hunger does not matter...and if someone is hungry tell them what they need is the bread of life....so they won't be hungry....rather it seems God's filling comes through provision...the church in the past has called it sacramental...God is pushing through the material and blessing the world....blessing you...we've got to learn to see it...and learn to be aware of it.....and believe God is blessing the world and you...we got to re-organize how we think about things....we've got it backwards, I think....we think our action of thinking precedes God's action of filling....but God provides now all you need...it's here.....do you believe that....

You don't have to figure it all out...you don't have to have all your moral ducks in a row....it is now Jesus said, "I am the bread of life"...it is no mistake the old testament reading is about the Israelites wandering hungry in the desert.....God provided manna not because they were "behaving or the had it all together...but because he promised to provide.....this seems to me to be the biblical story...we complain we rebel...and who can blame them hungry in the desert... and there God's response is love, mercy and provision....does that mean what we do does not matter....no not at all...but what it does mean is that God wants us to be motivated and transformed by love not power and

force...peace is not realized through power, but it is realized through love...the bread of life...the source of life not judgment and anxiety but life full and joyful...do you know that...do you believe or rather know you can be filled, do you believe your heart can light up with joy....this is the invitation to believe

So believe...let God fill you....

So God invites you to this table to believe...to believe in the midst of life's fog and life's inconsistencies, disappointments...that you believe God is filling you...Amen