March 12, 2017   
Luke 4:16-21   
I Believe in Jesus

Rev. Kerry Smith   
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

Luke 4:16-21 Common English Bible

Jesus went to Nazareth, where he had been raised. On the Sabbath he went to the synagogue as he normally did and stood up to read. The synagogue assistant gave him the scroll from the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me. He has sent me to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to liberate the oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor. He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the synagogue assistant, and sat down. Every eye in the synagogue was fixed on him. He began to explain to them, “Today, this scripture has been fulfilled just as you heard it.”

We are in the midst of Lent, the 40-day period of preparation for Easter. Our journey as a church family this Lent is to explore what we believe. I hope you will join us tonight at 5 pm in Glory Be Hall as we talk about our questions and share together about our beliefs. We are using the Apostles’ Creed as our jumping off point. Last week we talked about God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth and this week we talk about Jesus. Jesus gets an entire paragraph in the Apostles’ Creed.

When I think about my belief in Jesus I am reminded of a t-shirt that I had in high school from youth group. On the back it had a quote from C.S. Lewis’ book *Mere Christianity*, “A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said wouldn’t be a great moral teacher. He’d be either a lunatic on the level with a man who says he’s a poached egg or else he’d be the devil of hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the [Son of God](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Son_of_God), or else a madman or something worse.”

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, is seated at the right hand of the Father, and will come again to judge the living and the dead.

There are folks who think that Jesus was made up, but the evidence for his existence is overwhelming. There is a professor of religious studies at the University of North Texas, Bart Ehrman, who considers himself an agnostic, who devoted an entire book to examining the historic evidence for the existence of Jesus. He said, “Jesus did exist, whether we like it or not.”[[1]](#footnote-2) So, when we choose to believe in Jesus it is choosing to believe what the earliest Christians taught, preached, and wrote about him.[[2]](#footnote-3)

We have little in the Gospels about Jesus birth, the Gospels are mostly about Jesus’ three years of ministry. It is stories of Jesus traveling to the cities and villages, teaching, announcing the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness (Matthew 9:35). Jesus spent his time with those who were sick, those who were marginalized. Jesus’ words touched people, he prayed for people, and they were made well. Jesus was also frustrated with the religious leaders. He felt like they pushed people away from God rather than drawing people to God.[[3]](#footnote-4) Jesus was on a collision course with the religious authorities and the tension reached the breaking point when Jesus entered Jerusalem on what we now call Palm Sunday. People had been wondering if Jesus was the Messiah, the anointed one, the Christ, God’s chosen king, and when the crowds made a palm parade for Jesus that day, the religious authorities knew that they were in trouble.

The Hebrew prophets had foretold that God would send a king to rule with justice and righteousness. In Jesus’ time people wanted the Messiah to overthrow the Romans who occupied the Holy Land. Jesus didn’t seem concerned about overthrowing the Romans. Jesus said that God’s kingdom existed wherever people put their trust in God and sought to love God and love their neighbor.[[4]](#footnote-5) Jesus told the people that the kingdom of God was among them and within them. It wasn’t about a time in the future when life would be perfect and Israel would be free of Roman rule and be able to live in peace.[[5]](#footnote-6) The kingdom of God isn’t when you have all of your stuff figured out and life is perfect, the kingdom of God is right now.

As a Christian I live in God’s kingdom when I love God, when I love my neighbor, and especially when I love my enemy. I live in God’s kingdom when I feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick and imprisoned. I live in God’s kingdom when I am a servant, when I am humble, when I serve others.

Jesus didn’t come to save the people from the Romans, but to save the people from themselves. From hate, indifference, pride, and hypocrisy in every human heart that alienates us from God and from our neighbor. Jesus came to save us from fear, lovelessness, hopelessness, and ultimately death.[[6]](#footnote-7) On Good Friday human evil was seen and divine mercy was shown.[[7]](#footnote-8)

There was once a man who didn't believe in God, and he did not hesitate to let others know how he felt about religion. His wife did believe, and she raised their children to have faith in God and Jesus. One snowy Christmas Eve, the wife was taking the children to a Christmas Eve service in the farm community in which they lived. She asked her husband to come, but he refused. “That story is nonsense!” he said. "Why would God lower God’s self to come to Earth as a human? That's ridiculous!" So the wife and the children left, and the man stayed home. A while later, the winds grew stronger and the snow turned into a blizzard. As the man looked out the window, all he saw was a blinding snowstorm. He sat down to relax before the fire for the evening. Then he heard a loud thump. Something had hit the window. Then another thump. He looked out, but he couldn't see more than a few feet.

When the snow let up a little, the man ventured outside to see what could have been beating on his window. In the field near his house he saw a flock of wild geese. Apparently they had been flying south for the winter when they got caught in the snowstorm and could not go on. They were lost and stranded on his farm, with no food or shelter. They just flapped their wings and flew around the field in low circles, blindly and aimlessly. A couple of them had flown into his window. The man felt sorry for the geese and wanted to help them. He thought about how the barn would be a great place for them to stay. The barn was warm and safe. So the man walked over to the barn and opened the doors wide, then watched and waited, but the geese did not seem to notice the barn or realize what it could mean for them.

The man tried to get their attention, but that just seemed to scare them and the geese moved further away. The man went into the house and came back out with some bread, broke it up, and made a breadcrumbs trail leading to the barn. They still didn't catch on. Now he was getting frustrated. He got behind them and tried to shoo them toward the barn, but they only got more scared and scattered in every direction except toward the barn. Nothing he did could get them to go into the barn where they would be warm and safe.

The man thought for a moment and realized that the geese just wouldn't follow him, he was a human. Out loud he said, “If only I were a goose, then I could save them”. Then the man had an idea. He went into barn, got one of his own geese, and carried it in his arms as he circled around behind the flock of wild geese. He then released it. His goose flew through the flock and straight into the barn -- and one by one the other geese followed it to safety.

He stood silently for a moment as the words he had spoken a few minutes earlier replayed in his mind: "If only I were a goose, then I could save them!" Then he thought about what he had said to his wife earlier. "Why would God want to be like us? That's ridiculous!" Suddenly it all made sense. That is what God had done. We were like the geese and God had sent Jesus so Jesus could show us the way and save us. The man understood what Christmas was all about, why Jesus had come. Years of doubt and disbelief vanished like the passing storm. He fell to his knees in the snow, and prayed his first prayer: “Thank You Jesus for coming in human form to show me the way out of the storm!”[[8]](#footnote-9)

God loves us so much that God became human and lived among us. Jesus is God with us. Jesus modeled what it means to be authentically human. He demonstrated selfless sacrificial love and worked to change our hearts.[[9]](#footnote-10) Jesus changes us from the inside out so we will truly love God and our neighbor. And the longer we follow Jesus the more our heart, our values, our decisions change to be what God would want us to be and do. Jesus came to save us, to deliver us. Jesus is my Savior. Jesus is God’s response to when I miss the mark and do what I want to do instead of what God wants me to do. God wants me to be loving, compassionate, just, merciful, giving and honest, and I miss the mark countless times each day. I mess up in thought, word or deed and I don’t love God or love my neighbor.

“We believe in God and we all need Jesus” is the chorus of a song that Amy Grant sings. The cross means a lot of different things for us. It is a demonstration of divine love for us. It reminds us of the depth of human sin, the breadth of God’s graciousness and love, and God’s triumph over sin and death.[[10]](#footnote-11) Through the cross we are changed, we are saved from our sins and reconciled to God. The cross can be a sign for us that Christ knows the rejection we feel and a sign of the depth of God’s love for us.[[11]](#footnote-12) The cross can be a sign that Christ has borne our sin and despite the mess we have made of our lives, we can be forgiven.

Jesus calmed the violent storms, cast out demons, made the lame to walk and the blind to see and he raised the dead. The God who rules the universe comes to us, like one of us, born to a peasant family with an animals’ feeding trough as his first bed; chose to experience what it means to be human; that he would know joy and sorrow, love and hate, pain and death.[[12]](#footnote-13) In Jesus God experienced our humanity. God become one of us so that we might understand God’s will for our lives and for our world. Jesus was resurrected on Easter Sunday because evil, hate, sin and death did not have the final word on the day Jesus was crucified. The resurrection is God’s response to human mortality and our fear of death, but it is also a reminder of good over evil, love over hate, and life over death.[[13]](#footnote-14)

I am not capable of living love like God does, so I look to Jesus. Humanity was looking for a certain kind of Messiah, a conquering Messiah, and that is not what Jesus did. He showed us a more powerful way. Jesus showed the power of love in a more excellent way. Jesus came, not so we could feel different, but so we could be different.

Do you remember Saint Francis of Assisi? He called all creatures his brothers and sisters, and even preached to the birds. His first biographer wrote “He was always with Jesus: Jesus in his heart, Jesus in his mouth, Jesus in his ears, Jesus in his eyes, Jesus in his hands, he bore Jesus in his whole body.” We are called to live a life of service, because Jesus is in our hearts, our eyes, and our hands.

When I was a new pastor many years ago, a church member shared with me about their struggle with alcohol. They shared with me that they found hope in the resurrection of Jesus because they knew that they could overcome anything, even addiction, with the help of a God who had overcome death.  Jesus takes our brokenness and makes us whole. Thanks be to God, Amen.

1. Hamilton, Adam. Creed: What Christians Believe and Why. Abingdon Press, 2016. P. 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Hamilton, Adam. Creed: What Christians Believe and Why. Abingdon Press, 2016. P. 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Hamilton, Adam. Creed: What Christians Believe and Why. Abingdon Press, 2016. P. 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Hamilton, Adam. Creed: What Christians Believe and Why. Abingdon Press, 2016. P. 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Hamilton, Adam. Creed: What Christians Believe and Why. Abingdon Press, 2016. P. 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Hamilton, Adam. Creed: What Christians Believe and Why. Abingdon Press, 2016. P. 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Hamilton, Adam. Creed: What Christians Believe and Why. Abingdon Press, 2016. P. 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. http://thewoundedbird.blogspot.com/2011/12/christmas-story.html [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Hamilton, Adam. Creed: What Christians Believe and Why. Abingdon Press, 2016. P. 53. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Hamilton, Adam. Creed: What Christians Believe and Why. Abingdon Press, 2016. P. 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. Hamilton, Adam. Creed: What Christians Believe and Why. Abingdon Press, 2016. P. 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. Hamilton, Adam. Creed: What Christians Believe and Why. Abingdon Press, 2016. P. 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. Hamilton, Adam. Creed: What Christians Believe and Why. Abingdon Press, 2016. P. 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)