

February 19, 2017

“Belief, Faith and Trust”

John Wesley United Methodist Church

Hebrews 11: 1-3, 6-8, 29-30, 32-34, 12:1-2; Matthew 8:5-13

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I want to start with a video today that is rather edgy, funny and shocking.

<http://johnwesleyumc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/FAKENEWS.mpg>

Okay, now I showed you that video because it's the most extreme illustration of fake news I could come up with. "Fake news." That's a modern-day buzz term we're hearing more and more these days to describe all the misinformation we seem to be getting. We're bombarded with instant and 24/7 communications from so many different and conflicting sources, through television, radio, the Internet, our phones, that I just don't think we can believe everything we read and hear any more. It reminds me of something my dear mother-in-law told me years ago... "Believe none of what you hear, and only half of what you see." What sage advice from a different generation, a different era. Because from what I see, this “fake news” phenomenon is starting to affect us as individuals in the way we act and by the things we say. And the real danger is already becoming evident. And that is, we are turning into a nation of skeptics, when it comes to what we see, what we think and what we believe.

The editor-in-chief of the magazine, *The Week*, addressed this issue recently. He wrote... "What's going on? My guess is that several factors are conspiring to make us all more self-centered (and skeptical). Modern workplace culture is brutally Darwinian, with employees knowing that they are disposable at any time. Everyone is your competition. Our personal electronic devices encapsulate us in a bubble of private preferences and opinions. The commonness of shared information and basic values is fading away. My reality trumps yours. In fact, your very existence is an intrusion into my world. Our politics has become toxic. So where does this lead us? Nowhere good."

Nowhere good! And the worst part of it all is that because of our self-centeredness and skepticism, it's not a very great leap to then question our belief, faith, and trust in God. For when the world out there gets us down, we react negatively. We question the people, actions and events around us based on our own opinions and perspective; we question the truth of what we are being told from the various sources. Doesn't that ring true? And then how easily it becomes to question the actions, the truth, the promises of God. And that will definitely lead us nowhere good! No, if we are to stand strong in the midst of the turmoil of life, then we need to have a faith like the saints we heard listed in today's scripture. Or like the Roman Centurion, who confidently and boldly said to Jesus, “Just say the word, and my servant will be healed.” And he was!

Let me tell you another story about a great faith. George Mueller was a well-known and highly respected evangelist who lived in England during the 1800's. This man's passion was for the care and well-being of children. It's well documented that his orphanages provided a home and shelter for over 10,000 orphans during his lifetime. In addition, he established 117 schools which educated over 120,000 children. And George Mueller did all this without any money. If you read his biography, you'll find that this man depended solely on the beneficence of God to provide for him and his work. He communicated daily with God through that task so many of us find difficult, prayer. And, time and time again, God supplied his every need. One example – Mueller took a boat from England to Canada to meet with some wealthy benefactors in the hopes of raising money for his schools. However, on the way, a very dense fog rolled in over the ocean, bringing the ship to a virtual standstill. Mueller went to the Captain and said, “Captain, I came to tell you that I must be in Quebec on Saturday afternoon.” The Captain told him it would be impossible. “Mr. Mueller” he said, “do you know how dense this fog is?” “No,” Muller replied, “my eye is not on the density of the fog, but on the living God, who controls every circumstance of my life. So let us go down into the chartroom and pray.” The Captain followed Mueller, thinking to himself, “What kind of lunatic am I dealing with here.” When they got below, Mueller knelt down and prayed a simple prayer for God to lift the fog, and when he had finished, the Captain thought he ought to pray; but Muller put his hand on the Captain’s shoulder and told him not to. “Why not?” the Captain asked. “First,” said Mueller, “because you do not believe God will, and second, because I believe God already has, so there is really no reason for you to pray.” Mueller continued, “Captain, I have known my Lord for fifty-seven years, and there has never been a single day in my life that I have failed to get an audience with the King. Get up and open the door, and you will find the fog lifting.” Sure enough, the fog was dissipating. And George Mueller was in Quebec Saturday afternoon for his engagement.

Now my guess is that after hearing this story, most of you are skeptical, questioning whether this story is true. You may be thinking, I’ve never even heard of George Mueller, and it’s probably an old story, embellished over the years. Much like the fake news of today. But go ahead and research it, and you'll find it's true. That’s why I’m telling you the story. You see, all of us are here today because we want to believe in a God who is greater than ourselves, who can indeed perform miracles in our lives. But because the secular world out there has so tainted our thinking, we've become skeptics and we're caught in the middle, somewhere between “I’m not sure I can really believe that” and trusting, as Jesus said, “With God all things are possible.” So we struggle with how much faith we have in God to act in our

lives. And yet, it is crucial for us to have faith. As Hebrews told us today, “Without faith it is impossible to please God, for anyone who comes to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” Without faith it is impossible to please God. Think about this. Because how many times did Jesus tell those he healed, “Your faith has made you well.”

So, why do we struggle so much with this? Well, I think for two main reasons. First, many of us struggle because we think, “Why would God want to do something out of the ordinary, or even miraculous, for me? God has other people with bigger issues deal with.” And second, many Christians question the perceived conflict between faith and reason. Aren't we supposed to rely on our intellect, drawing rational conclusions, and rejecting those things that don't make sense?

Let's start with the first point. “Why would God do that for me?” Deep down we all know we are imperfect, and that can make us feel like we're undeserving, or our particular circumstances are unimportant to God. But that's not true! You are mistaken. That is the “skeptical” attitude. Because God does care what happens to you. God does care about every situation in your life. Remember, George Mueller's attitude was to “keep my eye on the living God, who controls every circumstance of my life.” And that applies to you as well. Think about it this way – just as a responsible loving parent is concerned about everything that happens to their child, about the decisions they make, about the things they do, so God is concerned about each one of us, his children. We need to believe God when He says, “I love you.” “I forgive you.” “I died for you.” “I will be with you always.” “I know the plans I have for you. Plans for good and not evil, to give you a future and a hope.” “I call you by name. You are mine.” God loves you completely, fully, unconditionally, always. And so start there. Because if you can believe in God's unconditional love for you, then you will believe that God can and will work miracles in your life.

Now the second point – weighing our reason against our faith. But the fact is that the two don't have to be mutually exclusive. Sometimes we get caught up trying to figure God out, but all that does is to create a chasm between us and God. But consider this – God gave us a mind, and he does expect us to use it. So “reason” can be looked at as a bridge that reaches across that chasm, but only part way; faith is needed to complete the bridge and reach the other side. You see, you will not always know or understand exactly how God may be working in your life. God said, “My ways are not your ways and my thoughts are not your thoughts.” And that's exactly the point. We must have the mindset that says God is greater than I am in all ways, God knows more than I could ever know, and God knows exactly

what God is doing. Then, we can trust in God's wisdom, judgment, timing and ultimate answer to all the concerns and needs and issues in our lives. Like I said before the prayer last week, it's not that we must have a great faith, it's that we have faith in a great God! And when we can believe in a great God, then we can consciously say to God, "I submit to your will. I acknowledge that you know what I need even better than I do. I trust that you are working in my life, and I will have faith."

So here we all are this morning. Feeling finite... frail... afraid... nowhere good... and skeptics all. But that's fake news! Because, in truth, we are blessed to live another day... fed... clothed... protected... and loved. Most especially loved. May we have the belief, the faith and the trust, in the one God who has promised us, "Do not be discouraged. Do not be afraid. For I will be with you always." Amen.