

Believing is . . .
(Faith is . . . Part Three)

Psalm 27:13-14 NRS I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!

Mark 5:35-36 NRS While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader's house to say, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?" But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe."

Titus 3:4-8 NRS But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. ⁶ This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. ⁸ The saying is sure. I desire that you insist on these things, so that those who have come to believe in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works; these things are excellent and profitable to everyone.

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Over the past two weeks we've looked at how words evolve over time, and how their meaning and their connotation gradually changes. The word *orthodox* has lost its original meaning of "correct worship" and has come to mean "correct belief." The word *truth* has come to mean "factual." We think of *faith* as what we believe and we only want to believe what is true. We take the statement that we are saved by faith, not by works, and because of how words have changed over the years, we can hear that to mean that we are saved by believing the right things, the facts. The past two weeks have been spent trying to unpack the original full meaning of the word *faith*. As we've seen, in scripture, *faith* is about trusting, about living in fidelity, and about our overall vision of God and how God interacts with life.

It may have sounded like faith as belief, faith as a matter of agreeing to certain statements or propositions is unimportant. That's **not** the case, but when we limit our understanding of faith to only belief, we've shortchanged ourselves and limited our relationship with God. Faith is so much more than just declaring that certain statements are factual. However, there are some very important foundational beliefs.

First, we must affirm the reality of God. Reality is not limited to what we see, taste, smell, feel, and hear. Reality is more than what we can prove using the scientific method. There is something more, a wondrous, magnificent and stupendous more – a more that we call God. One can't have faith in what one doesn't think exists.

Second, "Christian faith means affirming the utter centrality of Jesus. It means seeing Jesus as the decisive disclosure of God - and of what a life full of God looks like. It means affirming Jesus as the Word of God, the wisdom of God, the light of the world, the way, and more, all known in a person."¹ When we look at Jesus, we see God. We see how one leads a godly life. We see incarnation, God in flesh.

Third, "Christian faith means affirming the centrality of the Bible. . . . the Bible is the Word of God disclosed in a book. Being Christian means a commitment to the Bible as our foundational document and identity document. The Bible is our story. It is to shape our vision of life – our vision of God, of ourselves, and of God's dream for the earth."²

Just as the words *orthodox*, *faith*, and *truth* have changed in meaning over the years, so has the word *believe*. The word *believe* has changed a great deal since the 1600s.

Many of us know the way the Apostles' Creed begins: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth." That's an English translation of a creed that was originally written in Latin. "I believe" is the translation of the first word in the original Latin, the word *credo*. *Credo* is where we get the word creed. We think of a creed as something that we have to believe. We have to declare the truth, the factuality, of the creeds – or that's what we think is required. The creed is dogma, something you have to believe.

But the Latin word *credo* means "I give my heart to," "I commit my loyalty to," "I give my allegiance to." So the opening line of the Apostles' Creed means, "I give my heart to God the Father Almighty." The Latin word *credo* was translated as "I believe" because back in the 1500s, when the Bible and the creeds were being translated into English, "I believe" was an accurate translation. Back then, the words *I believe* always had an object. The verb believe always had an object, but the object of the verb was always a person. The object of the verb *believe* was never a statement. Believing didn't mean agreeing with a proposition. Instead, *believe* meant "to hold dear; to prize; to give one's loyalty to; to give one's self to; to commit oneself to a person, not a statement.

How does a traditional wedding service begin? "Dearly beloved, we are gathered here . . ." Dearly beloved. Those people whom we love. The English words "believe" and "belove" are related. What we believe is what we belove. Faith is about believing God."³

When the early translations of the bible and the creeds were made into English, believing was as broad in its meaning as faith was in its meaning back then. Sure, it sometimes included the aspect of agreement with a statement, but it also included trust, faithfulness, and a vision of the way life is.

Let's look at the texts for today. In Mark, the leader of the local synagogue came to Jesus asking him to come heal his daughter. Then some other people arrived and said, "Give up. Your daughter has already died." Then "Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe." Do not be afraid, only believe. Fear is the opposite of trust. Jesus said, "Don't fear – trust!" Believing in this text is trusting.

The Psalmist wrote, "I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living." I believe that I will see God's goodness here in the land of the living. This is the outlook that the psalmist has. The writer's vision of life is a faith vision, a vision that sees the love and mercy of God in life, here and now.

The text in Titus highlights two aspects of believing. The writer says "when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy." This is about vision – seeing God's loving kindness, God's goodness, and God's great mercy as the way that we see life, our faith outlook on life.. The writer goes on to say "those who have come to believe in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works." Devoting oneself is about fidelity. Devotion is about faithfulness.

So it is we see that, in scripture, belief is used in the fullness and richness of its original meanings. It is more than agreeing with facts. It is more than agreeing with something that can't be proved. Believing is about loving, loving in a faithful way that includes all of the aspects of faith, including trusting, fidelity, and having an outlook on life that sees God as gracious, generous, and loving.

We almost capture that richness of faith, that richness of believing, in rare moments. Imagine the man who comes home and announces that he's been fired at work. He's beaten and dejected. His wife takes his face between her hands and looks him straight in the eyes and says firmly, "I believe in you. I know that losing your job wasn't your fault. I know that you will search and search until you find work. I'm here for you and I'll always be here for you, through thick and thin. We will get through this, raise our family, and grow old together, because I believe in you. I love you. I have faith in you."

That's belief. That's faith. That's a loving relationship. "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." You shall have faith in the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. You shall believe in the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. You shall believe with all the richness and depth of the word *believe*. You shall have faith, including all the meanings and colors of the word *faith*. Amen.

¹Marcus Borg, *The Heart of Christianity* (New York, Harper Collins, 2003) p 37-38

²Marcus Borg, *The Heart of Christianity* (New York, Harper Collins, 2003) p 38

³Marcus Borg, *The Heart of Christianity* (New York, Harper Collins, 2003) p 40