

“Saying What We Believe” Acts 5:27-32 and Revelation 1:4-8 John 20:19-31

Growing up as a child in the 80's meant something drastically different than those generations that had come before. Tragic fashion choices aside, what was really such a change was that every moment of our lives seemed to be recorded on video tape. We had entered an era where a camera recorder was not just for the rich and famous or movie directors. Every second of our mundane lives were able to be recorded and saved for future viewing. My father was one of those parents who took to filming the lives of his children like a documentary film maker. That camera was not just taken out for birthdays, holiday celebrations or vacations. No, that thing never had the opportunity to let a speck of dust even fall on it, let alone collect in a closet somewhere. And as the designated anthropologist in the family, when that camera was rolling, it meant there was little to no interaction between the subjects (me and my siblings) and the observer (my father behind the lens). While there are many hours of mundane footage of us playing in the yard from 20-50 feet away, there are some moments that capture the essence of

being a child, and some of the issues that come with it. My brother and I are 1.5 years apart, the perfect distance in age which makes for some perfectly ripe conflicts. And thanks to that camera, a great many of those conflicts are on tape. No matter what the conflict seemed to be (usually involving me bossing my brother around until it reached physical interaction), these were moments where you can observe the unique way in which my parents attempted to help us resolve our issues, even at a very young age. Dad wouldn't put the camera down, but still filming you would hear his voice shout out to me or my brother.... "Remember, say how you feel."

And amazingly, most of the time, my brother and I would pause in whatever poking, kicking or hitting activity that had gotten out of control, and said how we felt. And we moved on to some other activity, peace restored among siblings.

And because this phrase was said to me and my siblings as children, it has become ingrained in my very essence. "Say how you feel."

But I found it strange that this was the phrase that kept coming to me as I read the texts for this morning. There is no conflict between siblings here, or a needed mediation. These texts are about belief, not feelings. If anything, the disciple Thomas has no difficulty in saying how he feels in this situation. A bit upset that he has missed the big event of Jesus revealing himself to the other disciples, he expresses his feeling of exclusion by stating that unless he sees the marks of the nails and is able to touch them he will not believe what the others are telling him. He will not be the butt of a cruel joke such as this. No sir.

And the author of the gospel of John is clear in his intent at the end of this chapter. These things that he has written down for us, these accounts of Jesus and the works that he did, are written so that we, the readers, those who have not been able to see Jesus for ourselves, they are written so that we might come to believe that Jesus is the messiah.

As Christians we come as a believing people. Yes, sometimes there is doubt, as Thomas experienced, and as I talked about last week. We are a people longing to see, to touch, but have to rely on our belief until the time when we will be able to see and touch the Messiah.

But in the meantime we say we believe. And we express that belief in many different ways. There is often a phrase thrown around when it comes to being a faithful Christian. “walk the walk and talk the talk.” Mostly this is used to emphasize the first portion, if you’re not willing to walk the walk, then don’t talk the talk. Show in your actions what it is that you are saying. Biblical texts are thrown around, proving what it is that we are displaying in our actions. People who find themselves on all points of the theological spectrum use this phrase, most often to discount what the other is saying. “Well, this is what I say, therefore, this is how I act.” I talk and then I walk. But what you talk is not right, therefore the way you walk can’t be right either.

Back and forth, back and forth, we go; walking and talking all over one another. Is this really belief? Or finding something religiously convenient to explain our behavior?

When my parents told us that we needed to say how we feel, the expectation was not that we would justify our actions to the other, but that we would stop and think as to why we were doing those things. If I was hitting my brother, I would not stop and say, “Noel, I am hitting you because you took this toy from me and the only way for me to get it back from your iron grip hands is to knock you in the arms until you let go and I can have it back. Historically this has worked, so I tried it once again.” Rather, I was supposed to say “Noel, I am upset that you took my toy without asking. It makes me sad and angry when you do that, which is why I hit you. I’m sorry.”

How refreshing it would be to be able to “say what we believe” like we “say how we feel.” Like the disciples when they are carried out of the temple for

teaching and they are asked by the priest, why are you doing this? The disciples say what they believe. "We are witnesses to Christ and we believe that he has given repentance and forgiveness of sins. Which is why we go to the temple and teach to others that their sins are forgiven because of Jesus." We teach because we believe in love and forgiveness. I feel loved and forgiven therefore I am going to share that with others.

Can we do this for ourselves? Can we say what it is that we believe, and actually believe it? What does it mean when we say our creeds, when we affirm our faith each Sunday, when we say the apostles creed later this morning. This is what I believe. I believe in God, who has created all things. I believe in Jesus, son of God, who lived as a human among us and died for our sins. I believe in the Holy Spirit, god moving through me. I believe in being in community with others, I believe in forgiveness and love. I believe in something beyond myself that is everlasting.

When we are able to say what it is that we believe, we are able to get to the roots of our walking and our talking. In conflict, it provides us with that pause, where we are able to reflect on what is really going on. Listen for that shout out from God, from the Holy Spirit, behind that camera lens. That voice that interrupts the talking and walking over each other. The voice that says, “remember! Say what you believe”. It is your belief that is the core of all the rest. When we say it out loud, we are reminded in the pause of who and what we really are. And it also lets those around us know that this is who I am. Just like it was important for my brother to know that I was mad because of his actions, it is important for others to know what it is that I believe. It shifts their perspective. It teaches them about who I am.

Teach each other about who you are. Remind yourself about who you are.

Say what it is that you believe because it is important that you have come to believe when you have not seen with your own eyes.