“Believe” David Finney, CLM

First United Methodist Church of Springboro April 11 2021

John 20: 19-31

• It is my privilege to be with you today, but like you, I’d much rather have Rev Amy Haines in this spot right now

o Like you, I pray for her health, her family, her church and career every day

• I was with SPRC on Monday when we met Rev Joe Royer

o Bishop Palmer and cabinet made a very nice appointment for us.

o While we will miss Pastor Amy, Ken, Nathan, Timothy and Rachel, our ministry will continue under Pastor Joe’s leadership

o I greatly respect and appreciate Pastor Amy’s leadership, I consider her and her family to be friends.

* I spent much of 2 years in Sunday School with Timothy
* And I spent a couple years singing in choir with Nathan
* Both good guys

• It was 5 years ago I was right here in the days following Pastor Suzanne Allen’s appointment to our District Office

o In that message, I included this line, stolen from Dr Seuss

* Do not cry because it is over, but be glad that it happened
* Celebrate all that Pastor Amy and her wonderful family have done here and anticipate great work in Northwest Plains District
* And welcome Pastor Joe, Kim and until OSU begins in August, Hope to Springboro
* Those of you who are grandparents, prepare to share grandkid pictures with Joe and Kim
* And this, next time we announce Ohio River Valley district needs laity delegates for Annual Conference, consider signing up, then visiting with Pastor Amy or Pastor Suzanne, or both in Lakeside
* The Gospel of John has 2 wonderful stories from the days following the glorious resurrection of Jesus, our Savior
  + The story of the fishing in the Sea of Galilee and Jesus forgiving Simon Peter can make me cry
    - Simon, Son of Jonah, do you love me?
    - Yes Lord, you know I do
    - Then feed my sheep
* And today’s lesson, which is taken from the Lectionary
* Thomas
* In John chapter 11, Thomas is described as willing to die with Jesus
* But we see his belief fade in John chapter 20
* My Wesley Study Bible is beginning to fall apart
  + I love this
  + The binding is breaking
  + Not because it sits on a shelf all the time
  + But because it travels with me
  + Because it is used frequently as I prepare weekly Devotions
  + The Commentary portion of the Bible contains notes of selected topics, and appear in context within the scripture text
  + The Commentary Says this about doubt, which you guessed it, appears in context within John chapter 20
  + Commentary on Doubt says this about Thomas:
    - A more significant title would be “Absent Thomas”.
    - If Thomas had been present on the earlier occasion (John 20: 19-23 when Jesus appeared to the disciples, Thomas would never have made is original statement of vigorous denial.
    - We don’t know why Thomas was absent previously; he may have had good and justified reasons.
    - But whatever the reason for the absence, it was his absence that caused him to suffer a long week of emotional and spiritual struggle, found in today’s lesson
    - **The best and surest place to maintain faith is in the company of his fellow believers**
    - But Thomas was absent, leading to his doubt
  + That commentary note is big
  + The best and surest place to maintain faith is in the company of fellow believers
  + How do we remain or move into the company of believers during a pandemic?
    - As I mentioned before, Facebook is full of devotional videos posted by Pastor Amy and myself.
      * And there are a handful posted by others
      * In Facebook, search for First United Methodist Church of Springboro to find some.
  + But that leads me to this
    - So maybe when face-to-face meetings are safe, maybe we need to conduct some classes in which we help folks grow in comfort with their devices, with the software we use to connect
    - Some of the electronic meeting methods are here to stay
      * So let’s help our folks become more comfortable with such
    - I know some of you have stopped participating in classes because you don’t like using the devices
    - Some say “I prefer face-to-face”
    - I get that, but on the other hand, sometimes meeting via software and devices can be more convenient
      * Less driving
      * Greater access to learning opportunities
        + I have been in class settings, from my home office, with people from all across Ohio
        + I have been in and led classes with folks from all over – tremendously convenient to do so
  + So look for classes to come to help us grow in this way
    - Not to make you use a computer
    - But to build ways in which we can be together with other believers
    - For I know that I have not seen many of you at all during the pandemic
      * While I have been in prayer groups, study groups, learning settings with many of you
      * And many from across the state
      * So it is possible to feel connected with believers, even during a pandemic
  + An example is we just finished a study of the 10 Commandments and what Jesus taught about each.
    - We had people in their 70’s in the class
    - People in their 80’s in the class
      * Youngsters like me in their 60’s
      * And a couple who were really young!!
      * All talking and praying about the 10 Commandments
      * All connected to each other through our use of tehnology
      * That is an example of being in the company of believers, even during a pandemic
* So rather than avoiding the technology and miss being in the company of believers, let’s learn how to use the technology so that we can be together
* I find it interesting that the Wesley Study Bible has this one entry on doubt
* But has three multiple on Faith, believing
* Like this one:
  + Then Wesley Study Bible says this about faith
    - Which is found in context within Luke chapter 7, and the story of the Roman Centurian who believed Jesus could heal
    - Commentary says: the church can spend a lot of energy trying to figure out who is in the kingdom and who is out.
    - Interestingly, the boundary lines seem to form around those who believe the same way we do!
      * Those who believe like me are in, the others are out
    - But Jesus offers us some surprises about faith.
      * The centurian is not even in the household of Israel, yet Jesus celebrates his faith (Luke 7:9).
      * Is it possible that faith can be found in unexpected persons?
      * In the scriptures, we see that Jesus sees faith not as a matter of accepting certain doctrinal teachings, but as trusting that God can bring transformation.
      * In the Wesleyan tradition, the journey of faith includes an expectation of transformation, change, and holy living
  + I find \*this\* commentary to be so profound
  + We can spend too much energy and thought on who is in and who is out, regarding the kingdom of heaven
  + And frequently our in/out criteria is centered around finding those who believe exactly as we do
  + Yet in the story of the Centurian, Jesus celebrates the Centurian’s faith, even though he is not in the right clique,
  + But because the Centurian trusted that God, through Jesus can bring about transformation
* That’s 2 excerpts from my Wesley Study Bible, right on point
  + Thomas and the rest of us can strengthen our faith when we are in the company of believers
    - When we are absent, doubt can begin
  + And Jesus celebrates belief in God’s ability to transform, irrespective of the believer’s background
  + That’s our Savior!
* After finding this help in my Wesley Study Bible, I looked some more
  + And I found the obligatory Wesley reference
  + Gotta have 1 John Wesley quote or observation in every message
* Wesley Study Bible then says this about Faith, within context of Hebrews 10.
  + Faith is one of the most important theological concepts for John Wesley, as well as one of the most complex.
  + Over time, Wesley came to think of faith in different ways, all of which are important.
  + Early on, he thought of it primarily as believing the truth of Christian revelation.
  + He never gave up that idea, but through his own experience of the Grace of God, he realized that faith also involves trust and confidence.
  + In fact, having this trust in God become so important that eventually he began to **consider faith as the evidence of God’s love that could secure our trust and confidence.**
  + Faith is the evidence of God’s love that can secure our trust and confidence
  + WOW – profound
* So that’s now 3 thoughts
* 1. We can maintain faith and overcome doubt when we are in the company of believers –
* 2. Jesus celebrates belief in God’s ability to transform, irrespective of the believer’s background
* 3. And now this, Faith is the evidence of God’s love that can secure our trust and confidence
* Mary Fogel has family in Missouri
* Perhaps you have family or friends in or from Missouri
* So why do they call it the Show Me state?
* Were there people from St Louis or Kansas City with Thomas when he expressed doubt about the resurrection of Jesus?
* Show me, then I will believe
* So how about you?
* Are you from the Show Me state or Show me City?
* Aside from being in the company of believers, how can we grow in faith, to believe?
  + Hard question
  + Pastor Amy encouraged the Confirmation class to read the Gospel of Luke during Lent
    - Wonderful idea
    - And she invited us to do the same, to support the Confirmation Class
    - So I did, I read the Gospel of Luke
    - Finished it, then read the Gospel of John and was surprised by what I read that I had forgotten was included in John’s account
    - Finished that, and now am reading the Gospel of Mark
      * Care to guess what I read next?
  + Pick up your Bible and read a chapter. Maybe not start with Second Chronicles, but read a Gospel, or one of Paul’s Epistle letters
* Then maybe join a small group study
  + Sunday School class – we now have 3 adult classes
    - Long-standing Cornerstone class, which now meets in person on Monday mornings here
    - Katie and Sarah’s Parenting class
    - And class I lead, looking at scriptures listed in the Lectionary
      * Today, we will meet from 9:45 to 10:30, then every Sunday thereafter
      * Join one of these classes
  + Or consider our existing small groups, outside of Sunday
    - Jenn Fry is leading a study on Thursday evenings at 7:00, titled You are Never Alone
    - Doug Dean is leading a study on Friday’s at 11:00, currently looking at a study book that was written to explore the novel To Kill a Mocking Bird
    - And the Tuesday 10:00 am class, led by Pastor Amy, currently looking at Acts of the Apostles – the early Christian church
    - And other short-term classes start up, run their course, and end
    - These are all ways in which we can be in the company of believers
    - Help our disbelief become belief
* Believe and be blessed