

“My Father and Your Father”

C-Easter: Acts 10:34-43; John 20:1-18, 4/21/19

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Easter Sunday is the most important and meaningful Sunday of our Liturgical year. This is the Sunday when we celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus. In our Christian tradition, the Resurrection is what really “saves us.” If we just “believe” in Jesus and “believe” he was sacrificed and resurrected to save us from our sins, we have our “ticket to Heaven.” Right?

But what does “**believe**” really mean? In our modern world, if we “believe” in something, we accept that it is true and valid. Yes, Jesus was resurrected. Yes, Jesus ascended into heaven. But as I’ve shared in sermons before, when the Gospel of John was first written, the word we now translate as “believe,” was “credo.” “Credo” is much deeper concept than our understanding of the modern English version of “believe.” Originally, “credo” meant that we not only “believe” something is true, we also “give ourselves to” or “commit ourselves to” what we “believe” is true.

From my perspective, I think our modern interpretation of the word “believe” in Scripture has been watered down and maybe even distorted our understanding and our faith. Sometimes we think it’s enough to just “believe” the Resurrection is true, and “believe” Jesus died for our sins, so we could go to heaven. The problem, again from my perspective, is that it’s not really enough to simply “believe” the resurrection is true and to “believe” that Jesus has gone to heaven. We also need to “give ourselves to” Jesus and to the Jesus Way of Love. What does that mean? From my perspective, it means if we really “believe” in Jesus, then we commit our lives to follow Jesus’ example, what I call Jesus’ Way of Love. We look for ways we can use our own gifts and skills and resources to love our fellow church members, and love our neighbors, near and far. And if we are not actively following the Jesus Way of Love, are we truly “believing” in Jesus, in the sense that Scripture originally meant, and was originally interpreted?

I think this has distorted Christianity in our current world. It has allowed us to simply “**believe** in Jesus,” without actually **following** the Jesus Way. It has made it less important to truly love and serve our neighbors. If you “believe” in Jesus, it’s OK to imprison or kick out your immigrant neighbors. And, it’s usually complicated to try to follow the Jesus Way of Love. A good example of the complication is the immigration issues we are currently facing. How do we address these immigration issues? Should we be addressing the issues in foreign countries, where the chaos is forcing people and families to leave their countries, and try to find a safe place to live? Should we be fighting against a border wall or a shut down against any crossing of the border? Should we be providing immigrants with food and shelter when they show up at our bus station?

The simplest thing to do would be to just believe in Jesus and ignore the immigration issue.

Why am I preaching about this on Easter Sunday? Well, I noticed something in our Gospel reading from John, that I've never noticed before. When Mary Magdalene met the resurrected Jesus in the Garden next to the tomb, Jesus said something I had never noticed or focused on before. Jesus said to Mary Magdalene, "Go to my brothers (referring to the disciples) and say to them, 'I am ascending to **my Father** and **your Father**, to **my God** and **your God.**'" "My Father and **your** Father, to my God and **your** God."

Jesus seems to be saying, "You are not just my disciples, my followers; You are my **brothers**. We are all part of God's **family** and Jesus' **family!**"

We all have the same Father and God as Jesus. We are like Jesus' brothers and sisters. And if **you** are part of God's and Jesus' family and **I'm** part of God's and Jesus' family, then **we** are all brothers and sisters.

What I hear Jesus saying, is we all need to be actively engaged in Jesus' and God's **family**. It's not enough to just "believe" that God is our Father. If we are all part of Jesus and God's family, shouldn't we connect with and support and serve each other, like a good loving family? And if we are part of the family, don't we need to "give ourselves to" to be actively engaged in the activities of the family?

I think if we are family, we need to "credo" each other. We need to "give ourselves to each other" in active love.

Jesus, as he was about to physically leave them, seemed to want his disciples, and he seemed to want Mary Magdalene, to know they were all part of God's family, one big family, and that they should be actively loving and supporting each other.

I think this difference in "believing" in Jesus and actually "giving ourselves to" the Jesus Way of Love is becoming a **generational issue**. I think I see this in both of my sons. Neither of them actively attend church anymore. (Seth is active in a spiritual community, but not a normal church.) But both of my sons, are actively involved in reaching out to **love** their neighbors who are suffering: immigrants, people of color, low income families, tenants.

We know the wider church is aging. Fewer and fewer younger generation families are attending. I don't know exactly what's going on, but I think one of the issues is the younger generations are not attracted to a faith community that simply "**believes**" in Jesus, but is not engaged in actively **reaching out to love each other** and especially their neighbors who are suffering.

We know that Jesus' focus was on reaching out to and loving, helping, healing those who were struggling. He wasn't really focused on convincing the rich and the wealthy to simply "believe" in him.

So what does this have to do with Easter and the Resurrection? What does this have to do with going to Heaven? It's complicated. I don't have this nailed down completely. But this is what I'm hearing: God is calling us to the Way of Family, the Way of Love. And Jesus was our example.

I think we will find our Way to Heaven, to God, to our Father if we follow the "**credo**" way of believing: we "believe" in Jesus, **AND** following Jesus' example, we "give ourselves to" the Way of Love. Our lives will become more complicated and challenging if we focus on loving and serving our neighbors, instead of focusing on simply "believing" in Jesus and God. Jesus' life was complicated and difficult as he followed the Way of Love. And the lives of his disciples became complicated and difficult as they tried to follow the way of love.

But I must say that this faith community of Reconciliation, has done the best job of any church I've ever been affiliated with in reaching out to love one another, and love our neighbors. And that is why we are a vibrant faith community and I think that's why we have a good number of younger adults and families.

So on Easter Sunday, we celebrate that Jesus was resurrected to **his** Father and his God, who is also **our** Father and our God. And we can also celebrate on Easter Sunday that we are all part of God's and Jesus' Family, **and**, we are all called to love one another, as a family.

Amen