

Although we just read it, allow me to recap the very last part of the Gospel text for today. The lesson today from John 2 ends with verse 22, which reads:

“After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.”

Those three words just stared me down ... Then **they** believed.

Which brings up the question that arose in my mind for today’s message... When did **WE** believe? (long pause for meditation, looking at everyone)

In ancient times, people believed whenever they looked around them. Gods were attributed to most natural things that occurred that could not (yet) be explained by science. Ancient Greeks believed that Helios rode his chariot across the sky wearing a radiant crown and that explained the daily passage of the sun through the sky. Ancient Romans called Mars their God of War who bestowed military power and strategy to secure peace. Thor was the God of Thunder in Norse mythology and was associated with thunder and lightning by use of his hammer. The 2016 movie “Gods of Egypt” portrayed a story wherein many deities clashed; my favourite being Horus who was God of kingship, healing, protection, the sun and the sky.

Maybe for us, in these more recent and enlightened times, your family believed and went to church where you were raised in a certain religion, learned about it in Sunday Church School, confirmation and youth group - and you’ve always believed.

Maybe, like me, you were not raised in the church. For me, it was at the lowest point in my life as a teen, when I asked for what seemed like the umpteenth time “God, why ME?!” and for the first time I heard an answer. That’s when I believed.

I know another person who was raised in a Christian home here in Canada and was taught to believe in God and the trinity of God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. As a youth they went on a 1-year student exchange in Japan where over 90 per cent of people are Shinto and/or Buddhist in their religion and don’t believe in Christ. Many Japanese practice both Shinto, a nature-based belief system, AND Buddhism, a religion of philosophy based on the teachings attributed to Buddha.

This youth had their whole belief system upended. After all, they thought, how can nearly a whole country be wrong by not believing in Christ Jesus? (pause) The experience did inspire them to return home and later study theology.

We're all familiar with Peter, who denied knowing Jesus not once but three times after he was arrested. Did he STOP believing? According to the scriptures, the answer is no because he continued to proclaim his words and deeds.

And what about the disciple Thomas – commonly known as doubting Thomas – who wouldn't believe that Jesus had returned after his death until he could lay his hands on the wounds of Jesus' skin. We know that HE continued to believe and proclaim Christ as Lord and Saviour.

But now that I think about it after reflecting on all of that, perhaps I have misinterpreted the question. Maybe I've missed the point. The reading today stated "Then **they** believed." And from that I asked "When did **YOU and I** believe?"

But I believe the statement more correctly reads "**THEN** they believed." Which when considered towards us here today, the relevant question would be: **WHEN** do you and I believe? (brief pause)

Do we only believe when we are thinking about it at church on Sunday morning – in person or on Zoom?

Do we believe only if we are contributing members here who show their commitment to their faith and our community through the offering of time, talent or money?

Do we only believe when we are graced with generosity or blessings in our daily lives?

Do we believe only when we are faced with the grief of losing someone close or important in our lives? Or even when we face our own mortality?

Do we strive to believe only when we pray for mercy and are faced with a most difficult time of trial, fear, pain, uncertainty or other challenge when we need God?

Can we believe in Jesus when we see a beggar on the street median or a person living under a bridge in a tent or sleeping bag?

I cannot honestly answer many, if any, of those questions unless I were to find myself face-to-face in those situations, in the moment, or when I have had time to stop and think about them. And I certainly can't answer for anyone else, for we are all individuals with different upbringings, education, life experiences and faith. I hope that with the reading of each one, you were perhaps encouraged to take a moment to think about it and relate to it.

And yet, what I can wholeheartedly share with you is this:

Life is ALWAYS better **WHEN** we believe.

When we believe in the birth of Jesus Christ, it can give us hope that God does make wonderful things happen in our lives and even see some around us each day.

When we believe in the life that Jesus was leading for us to see, to serve others in God's name, it easily can inspire us to do the same here and now in our own community and world.

And when we believe in the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, it allows us to recognize and alleviate the suffering for ourselves and others. It allows us to believe that all lives DO matter and each one can make a difference in the world. It shows us that our efforts today will last long past our own existence, helping to create a more forgiving, peaceful, supportive and loving world.

Lastly, believing in Jesus can give us each hope that in all that we do and experience in our lives, we are NEVER alone because the risen Christ is always with us. In short, WE believe every time we look for Jesus in our world and in our lives.

I recently read a story that told this quite well. Unfortunately, I don't know who wrote it to give them credit, but I will share the story with you now. Perhaps you have already heard it....

A man went into a barbershop to have his hair cut and his beard trimmed. As the barber began to work, they began to have a good conversation and talked about so many things. When they eventually touched on the subject of God, the barber said: I don't believe that God exists.

Why do you say that? asked the customer.

Well, you just have to go out in the street to realize that God doesn't exist. Tell me, if God exists, would there be so many sick people? Would there be abandoned children? If God existed, there would be neither suffering nor pain. I can't imagine a loving God who would allow all of these things.

The customer thought for a moment, but didn't respond because he didn't want to start an argument. The barber finished his job and the customer left the shop. Just after he left the barbershop, he saw a man in the street with long, stringy, dirty hair and an untrimmed beard. He looked dirty and unkempt. The customer turned back and entered the barber shop again and he said to the barber: Do you know what? Barbers do not exist.

How can you say that? asked the surprised barber. I am right here. I am a barber. And I just worked on you!

No! the customer exclaimed as he pointed. Barbers don't exist because if they did, there would be no people with dirty long hair and untrimmed beards, like that man outside.

Ah, but barbers DO exist! That's what happens when people do not come to me.

Exactly! affirmed the customer. That's the point! God DOES exist! Because people do not look to God for help is why there's so much pain and suffering in the world.

We believe whenever we seek God. So I leave you with this thought...

In everything that we say and do - believe **THEN**.

AMEN.