

Fourth Sunday in Lent
Sermon Text: John 3:14-21
Related Text: Ephesians 2:1-10
Numbers 21:4-9
Date Preached: March 22, 2009

This past Christmas Macy's had as their seasonal slogan the word "Believe". Their commercials, their printed advertisements and billboards all encouraged the reader or viewer to believe.

That's all well and good. Of course, it leaves one with an important question. Believe in what? Believe in whom? Did those who were laid off from Macy's after the Christmas season believe? What of people who believed the advice they were given on their investments, that didn't pan out well. In what or whom did they believe?

We live in an ever diverse society. Recent surveys indicate that in this country while a large majority still believe in God, that number has not only declined, but those who practice their beliefs through participation in worship has also declined.

Now some of us may not be surprised by this news. Some of us may lament the lack of importance our belief has in the day to day lives of people or the impact of our belief in God as it relates to our culture.

Another way of looking at this issue is to see this is a prime opportunity for us as the church to engage our neighbors and communities by publically voicing our beliefs.

Imagine the impact we can have by sharing our belief in God with the people around us. We wouldn't be the first people to do this. We have examples on how to share our belief.

One such example is in our reading from Numbers. When the serpent struck the Israelites, they complained to Moses. They confessed their sin against God. They asked for help.

God provided a way for those who were struck to be healed. It wasn't by removing the serpents. It was by lifting a bronze serpent on a pole and having those struck by a poisonous serpent look at that serpent of bronze and live. It took Moses and others to convey this message to the Israelites. Believe in God for he has given you a way to experience his healing.

Believe in God, for he has given us a way of experiencing healing and hope for our broken, confused, and fearful of the unknown lives. It is not by removing the serpents in our lives. God invites us

into believing based on what he has done for us in the past.

What has God done? It is to believe that first that God created the heaven and the earth. This belief is important as it provides the reason for what comes next.

As Christians we believe in this one God who has created us in his image. We are God's handiwork. God gave us life. As part of God's ongoing creation, he continues to provide us with the necessities of life.

When humankind became disobedient like a two year old having a tantrum, God simply didn't abandon us. God went to great lengths to restore our broken relationship. He went so far as to become human himself.

Believe in Jesus Christ, the only Son of God. Jesus has restored us. He purchased us and freed us from sin, death and the power of the devil by giving himself in exchange for our lives. All this was done so that we may belong to him, live and serve him in eternal righteousness, innocence and blessedness.

Believe in the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that helps us in our belief. You can see in Luther's

explanation to this article in the Apostles Creed that it is only through the Spirit that we can believe in God, believe in Jesus Christ and come to him. It is the Holy Spirit that has called you through the gospel, enlightened us, makes us holy and keeps us in true faith, abundantly forgiving all sins.

For many of us this may not be a new learning. Many of us have heard this before. I hope that we have heard it in worship. I hope we have heard it in Sunday school. I hope we have heard it in conversations with other Christians.

I hope we have seen this belief in the faces of those we have helped through our food pantry, or in the people who have received quilts made by the Hilltop quilters group or in the hands on projects of Thrivent such as the Hunger Garden.

Not only is it important that we believe but our belief in God is so foundational to who we are that it compels us to share this good news. We are a people continually grace by God. Motivated by this grace, we live out our belief in God in our words and deeds.

“By grace we have been saved through faith, and this is not our own doing; writes the Apostle Paul, it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one

may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.”

Let our belief be witnessed by others as the way of life for Christians, now and forever. AMEN.