

I Have Let You See

Deuteronomy 34:1-12; Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5

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What we believe has real world consequences. Not what we *say* we believe, but what we *really* believe. Last week's horrendous events in Buffalo and Laguna Woods are just two of the latest tragic examples of this truth. What we believe matters. Not what we profess to believe, but what we actually believe as revealed in our actions.

Almost every week in worship we have an affirmation of faith. Sometimes the worship leader prefaces our corporate recitation of that creed with this question: Christians, what do you believe?

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God.

We believe that God has entrusted the church with the message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ.

We trust in God the Holy Spirit, everywhere the giver and renewer of life.

These are from the Apostles' Creed, Nicene Creed, Confession of Belhar and a Brief Statement of Faith, all documents in the Book of Confessions, part I of our Presbyterian Constitution, some of what we say we believe.

But, Christians, what do you really believe? In the depths of your heart and the marrow of your bones? It matters. It makes an impact for good or for ill. It shapes your life and our congregation and this community and yes, God's beloved world.

James K.A. Smith in his book, "You Are What You Love, the Spiritual Power of Habit" writes that we are what we love, and we may not love what we think we love. He invites us to "take a liturgical audit of our life." He writes, "Look at your daily, weekly, monthly, and annual routines. What are the things you do, that do something *to* you?" I would content that those routines will reveal in large part, what you truly believe. Where do you spend your time, your energy, your money? To what or whom do you give your attention? What, or whom, do you neglect? Ignore? Avoid? What takes priority and what gets your leftovers?

Smith adds, "What are the secular liturgies of your life? What vision of the good life is carried in those liturgies? What story is embedded in those cultural

practices? What kind of person do they want you to become? To what kingdom are these rituals aimed? What does this cultural institution want you to *love*?" I would add, what, or whom, do they want you to hate? (Page 55)

Those liturgies and practices, whatever they are, reveal what we believe, what we value, what we love, and what we really worship. They shape not just us, but our world.

Christians what do you believe?

Are those beliefs reflective of scripture? Of Jesus? Of God's vision and promises, God's commandments and covenant?

God tells Moses: I have let you see the Promise Land, but you won't enter it. I've always read this and felt badly for Moses. It seems unfair and miserly of God. After all Moses has been through, his stalwartness and steadfastness. The courage he showed, the grumbling he endured, the pain he weathered. He is so close to experiencing the culmination of all that faithful obedience and God says: I have let you see it, but you will not enter. Joshua will take the people the rest of the way.

However, reading the story this year, I came to see God's actions as a gift, as grace, a reassurance to Moses that he had done all that the Lord required, and he need not do anything more. I now understand that glimpse of the promises' fruition as an assurance that all that work, hardship, joy and challenge, was not in vain. Moses' belief in the goodness and power of the God who called and equipped him was not misplaced and it furthered the salvation story that would save not just the Israelites but all of creation.

It is as if God is saying, well done, good and faithful servant. Rest in peace. You did your part in my plan. Moses, belief that God could vanquish Pharaoh, that enslavement wasn't inevitable, his faith that manna comes every morning, his confidence in a cloud and pillar of fire leading him through the wilderness, shaped a community and changed the world. What he believed and the one he followed freed the Israelites and made a way for the rest of us.

Christians what do *you* believe?

The Spirit showed John of Patmos the vision of heaven that God will bring to fruition. Not just a return to Eden, but a paradise even more abundant and glorious, a place not just for two people, but for every tribe and nation. A vision of healing and safety, nothing accursed, nothing to be feared, the gates wide open because there is nothing and no one that needs to be shut out anymore. The promise of reconciliation between God and humanity, between humanity and creation, between people everywhere, accomplished and evident. God's presence unmitigated, our belovedness unquestioned, not just manna in the morning but fruit upon fruit available always, leaves that heal every hurt, the river of life flowing through the middle of the city, falsehoods banished, the Way, the Truth and the Life flourishing and free. No more destruction, violence or exploitation. No

scarcity, want or suffering. No fear, pain, desolation or despair. See – your belief in the goodness and power of God – even in the midst of upheaval and persecution – it is not misplaced. God’s will, will e done on earth, as it is in heaven.

Christians, is this what you believe?

What we believe matters. Not what we say, but what our actions embody, and our lives reflect. They have real world impact and we believe the Gospel, we follow Jesus Christ, the world should therefore know us by our love.

Smith writes this: “The point of apocalyptic literature is not prediction but *unmasking*—unveiling the realities around us for what they really are.” (Page 39)

The harsh realities around us are counter to the Promised Land and the Kingdom of heaven that God has let us see and the Spirit has shown us. The headlines do not reflect the character of our Savior nor the will of our God.

In her book, “Holding Faith,” theologian Cynthia Rigby writes that standing up for what we believe, “starts with creating sacred spaces in our lives to imagine a reality of the Kingdom of God with clarity and consistency. Insofar as we can envision a peaceable Kingdom in which wolves and lambs lie down together and every tear is wiped away from every eye, I believe we will be driven by impatient hope to do the will of God that makes it actual on this earth.”

She goes on to say, “When our work is founded in the promises of a graceful and loving God, our focus is not on what we can and can’t do, but on what God intends to do, and how God desires to work with us.” (Pages 287-88)

Do we believe in the promises of a graceful and loving God? Do we have a vision for what God has so generously let us see, and what the Spirit has so mercifully shown us?

Are we driven by impatient hope? To be a people blessed to be a blessing and a light to the nations? Is our faith eager to see creation overflowing with abundance? Children welcomed? The least of these especially loved? Sinners forgiven? Can we so envision every tribe and nation gathered around the table, that we create the sacred space to bring it to fruition? Are we so clear on God’s intention for beloved community, we do whatever it takes to make reconciliation real? Is God’s will written on our hearts in ways that make us impatient to the point of action, so that justice rolls through the streets? Each person fed and housed and safe? Is our biblical imagination so acute that we embody it spontaneously, daily to the point that nothing hurtful is present not just in the holy city, but in this one? Are we ready to be enlisted to open wide gates and break down walls and be repairers of the breach? Is God’s hope so embedded in us that we beat swords into plowshares? And make sure every tear is tended to with care?

Christians, is this what we believe? What we imagine? What we so impatiently hope for that God uses us? To be the Body of Christ?

Theologian Willie James Jennings writes, “Jesus gathers in God—divine desire permeating his life and work—and now in him we see what God wants: communion. ...I am turning my attention to the original trajectory of a God who has ended hostility and has drawn all of creation into a reconciliation that we do not control. God offers us an uncontrollable reconciliation, one that aims to re-create us, reforming us as those who enact gathering and who gesture communion by our very existence. We end hostility.” (After Whiteness, page 152)

Christians, is this what we believe? Is this our true hope? Our deepest desire? The vision that shapes our imagination and compels us to act? Jennings adds, “This, of course, is a dream, but it is God’s dream.”

God has let us see, the Spirit has shown us: through Christ all things are possible.

Do we believe this? Not just with our words, but by our very existence? Jennings continues in poetry:

*He blessed it and broke open his dream, one part in each hand.
To those on his left and those on his right, he said the same thing
as he handed them his dream, “Eat this dream,
and it will kill the dream that kills.”*

*Hands trembling, they wondered which of their dreams
would die and which would grow stronger.*

Christians, what do you believe? Who do you follow? How, then, will you live? Whose dream are you making a reality? Will we truly be the Body of Christ – Here and now, for the sake of the world?