

19th Sunday after Trinity and Baptism of Isaac Mahaffey: October 10, 2021

“Who Are You Going To Believe?”

Grace, Mercy, and Peace be unto you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

What are you going to believe? According to the world, there are some pretty controversial and downright silly things happening in our texts this morning. We are reminded of the creation of the world by the One True God, the Holy Trinity, in 6-24 hour days. We are told to put on this imaginary armor that can withstand the schemes of the devil, because we are to believe that there is more than this flesh and blood world. We bore witness to a baptism this morning, which the world argues all we did was get a child wet so we could take some nice pictures.

The question today really is, “Who are you going to believe?” The world says to look to your feelings, your senses, your experiences and if it doesn’t make sense to you, who cares about others; but, if it makes no sense to you, then it cannot be true for you. According to the world, you are all gods in your own right. You get to decide all of reality for yourself, and everything and everyone must agree with you, because you are the only one that can be right about anything at all. You don’t just want to be adults, you want to be gods, commanding all of the respect, pomp and circumstance that befits a being of your stature.

If you desire to be a god, there is another God of whom you should be aware. He says, ***“I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.”***¹ This is the same God who we find in the Old Testament reading who created the world. It wasn’t you or I who did this work. I can barely follow directions to put together a bookshelf; there is no way it was me who created the world from nothing.

This God is the same God who was brooding over this creation. Unlike you and me, He loves and cares for all of His creation, not just bits and pieces of it at certain times when it crosses His mind. It is this same God who says, ***“Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.”***² Trust like a child is hard for us adults, but vitally important.

¹ Exodus 20:5–6

² Mark 10:15

I know that reason says there is no way this magnificent and beautiful creation was done in six days; but the Bible says it is. “Yeah, but Pastor, how do you know that those days are the same as our days?” Simple, God records His words in language for children to understand, “***There was evening and morning, day one.***”³

If I cannot believe that the One True God can create the world in six days, what kind of a God is He really? If I cannot trust that the Triune God whose words are recorded in the Holy Bible to be true, why should I believe Him when He says I am a sinner, or in need of a Savior? If I cannot trust these words to be accurate, and God is lying about creation, how can I trust His motivation about anything else? What else is He lying about?

It is because you fear, love, and trust in God above all things, Isaac was brought to the font this special day. There is a battle. There is an evil one who hates God. He doesn't do well with authority, and seeks sinful power. He is already judged, and in toddler tantrums, he lashes out at God's good creation. He schemes and plots and deceives and slings fiery arrows of doubt, and despair, and false belief and shame and vice at God's children. He enticed Adam and Eve, and that sin corrupts us all. You have brought Isaac today because you know there is a struggle that is not just flesh and blood.

So, who are you going to believe? Yourself or someone else? Jesus returns to the place where He did His first miracle of turning water into wine. When He gets there, He is met by a man with a very ill son. This wasn't just any ordinary man either, he was an official, a nobleman, a somebody around town; and what does Jesus say?

“Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe.”⁴ Why should we? Why should we believe and risk playing the fool without signs and wonders? What good is faith if it does not deliver? We have read the Bible. Where is our bronze serpent? Where is this Triune God? If I can't make the mountains to jump into the sea should faith not at least make COVID, or masks, or death go away? Where are the flames that lit upon the apostles' heads? Where is Gideon's fleece dry when the ground is wet? Where is the pillar of fire or the pillar of cloud? Why were these signs and wonders given to them while we are rebuked? Why must our sons die in Capernaum instead of drinking wine in Cana?

³ Genesis 1:5

⁴ John 4:48

The nobleman had left his dying boy to bring home a miracle worker. That took some faith, some latent hope, some burning ember of belief that Jesus could help. But the miracle worker who turned water into wine would not go with him. He would not leave Cana. The nobleman's authority was not enough to command Him and only earned him a rebuke. It must have seemed as though the faith and hope, the desperate prayers from Capernaum to Cana, had all been in vain.

According to our standards, Jesus would not have made a very friendly and happy-go-lucky pastor. In the face of such desperation He dares to preach the Law? He sees that faith is still lacking, still imperfect, and He will not pretend that it is good enough, that He is impressed. He will not be winsome or polite. He will not be patient or seemingly even kind. He will not meet felt needs. He sees into the man's heart by the man's words. He rebukes. He brings faith to its knees. The Gospel text read at baptism records Jesus being displeased with His disciples and he rebukes them. He places a child in their midst, and He says, "The kingdom of God is for children. It belongs to children. It is not for high and mighty adults who approach in sinful pride. All the knowledge of the world means nothing if you don't have faith like a child. The Kingdom of God belongs to those who fear, love, and trust as an innocent child, in God above all things."

It was with this the official still struggled. Jesus makes the father come to full desperation and forget his nobility. Then He commands: "Go your way" and all he adds is "Your son lives." But what does that mean to a father full of fear? Does it mean that his son lives in heaven? Does it mean he lives right now but will die within the hour? Or does it mean, does he dare to hope, that the fever has left him? The nobleman is not told. Nothing is explained. No promise is made. It is not "Your son will live." It is a simple declaration in the present tense: "Your son lives." That is it. Nothing more. Take that and go on your way.

Our translation translates this as a future tense. It has Jesus say "Your son will live." That makes it nice. It becomes a promise, something the man can hold on to as he returns to Capernaum.

But it is not a future tense in Greek. Language is complicated and tenses have various nuances. It is possible in Greek that in some instances a present tense verb can be used to imply future realities. It is possible in English to do a similar thing. A simple present in English often indicates a habitual, on-going action. If I say "I swim" I don't mean that I am swimming right now. I mean, rather, that swimming is part of what I do regularly. I am a swimmer. Presumably, then, I will keep on swimming and will swim in the future.

Maybe this is what Jesus meant when He says “Your son lives.” He means that the son is alive at the moment and this status will not change. But it is deliberately ambiguous. The father is not told what will happen in the future.

Jesus could have made this crystal clear by using a future tense verb and adding a vow. He could have said, “Amen, Amen. Do not be afraid. Your son will live.” But He didn’t. Contrary to the way that Jesus is commonly portrayed, He is rarely interested in being nice or even in comforting people the way we think of comfort. He is not concerned with avoiding conflict. He is not interested in maintaining the status quo. He is not trying to keep everyone comfortable or protect feelings. In fact, Jesus likes to disrupt and shock sinners out of their lethargy. He wants to upset pagans who don’t know they are pagans and drive the money changers in us out of us so that we would cease our idolatry; so that we would renounce our silly notions of godhood and confess Him as the only True God. What He cares about, what He is interested in, is faith and eternity.

When He tells the man that his son lives, He makes no promise about the future. It is deliberately vague. It is not a sign or a wonder. The command “go” implies some urgency. The man should go because his son lives and he does not know how long it will last.

Miracle of miracles: that mysterious sentence changed the nobleman. He had tried to command Jesus. He did not ask. He commanded: “Come down before my child dies.” But Jesus said: “Your son lives” and everything changed. It was not the nobleman who believed. It was the man, the father of the son. His nobility was stripped away. John had called him an official, royalty, a nobleman; but after Jesus says: “Your son lives” it is not the nobleman, who believed.

It was the man, who believed. The Word of Jesus changed him. He went on his way. He obeyed and believed as a simple man, stripped of pretensions, no longer glorying in his faith, no longer making demands of God, but resting in the Word of Jesus. He still doesn’t know just what it means, but Jesus said it and that is good enough. This is how faith lives between Cana and Capernaum without signs or wonders.

He was not the first parent to get a son back from the dead. The widows in Nain and Zarephath had experienced this miracle as well. The Syro-Phonician woman got her daughter back from demons. Abraham, too, got Isaac back from the mountain and Issac got Joseph back from brotherly murder.

God provides. He always does. But most significantly Our Father in heaven got His Son back from the dead. When it was finished He gave up His spirit and went to heaven. That Son didn't have to die. He didn't have to be forsaken by the Father and feel the hatred of the mob burning in His hands and feet.

He didn't have to – except that His love demanded it. He Himself said that it was necessary. Love drove Him to the cross. It was necessary. Love desired to drive off the fever in Capernaum and change water into wine in Cana. Love demanded death to put death to rest, so that Jesus could stand in the upper room and pronounce peace upon the Church and establish the Ministry of reconciliation. The Father lost the Son on the cross. He turned Him over to the devil and set Him to endure the tortures of Hell. And there was nowhere for Him to turn, no ram caught in the thicket, no miracle worker to seek, no prayer left to be said. He was alone. When it was finished He committed His Body to rest in the grave for three days, but not His soul. His soul did not delay. He went straight to the Father. He went to heaven and told Our Father what He told the nobleman: Your Son lives. The Sacrifice is complete. The Father's wrath has been appeased. Hell has lost its claim. God's good will has been restored.

This is said to Isaac today. P.J. and Richelle, your son lives! He has been baptized into the death of Christ. He was buried with Christ by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, he too might walk in newness of life. He has been united with him in a death like his, and he shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. Isaac's old self was crucified with Christ Jesus in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that Isaac would no longer be enslaved to sin. Because Isaac has died with Christ, He also lives with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So Isaac, and you also, must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.⁵

The nobleman had to learn to believe in Jesus, not just stuff about Him, but to believe in Him. He doesn't get a promise about this life or a miracle. He believes that come what may, Jesus is good and Jesus has authority over life and death, and Jesus will take care of it. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. There are many rooms in His Father's house and He goes there to prepare a place for us. The nobleman had to learn to accept death. The wages of sin is death, and Jesus paid it all!

⁵ Romans 6:3–11

For us, to live is Christ, to die is gain. If we live in the flesh, it means fruitful labor. We continue in the good works which Christ prepared for us. We serve another. We love our fathers and mothers and brothers and sisters and children. We do not hinder them from being brought to Jesus that He might touch them; that they may hear Him truthfully say, "***I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.***"⁶

If we die, we go to Christ and are free of these burdens and will have our loved ones who are with us in the faith forever. If we stay alive in this life, if we have to walk back to Capernaum without a miracle, it is no longer we who live. We have been crucified with Christ who lives in us. The lives we now live, while we are dying, we live by faith in the Son of God who loves us and gave Himself for us. Whether we live or we die, we are the Lord's.

Who are you going to believe? The Lord and giver life! Brothers and sisters in Christ, Jesus lives. His life is given to you through His Word and His Holy Sacraments. You've come this day to modern day Cana, where water regenerates the dead sinner, and where wine carries the Blood of Christ to make glad the hearts of all children. You've got your miracles and signs. Be strengthened and encouraged and then go on your way. Go back to Capernaum and the workday world. God's Son lives. So will your children. So will you.

Fellow children, God has spoken,
"Ever shall Mine eyes behold thee; On My bosom thou art laid.
Ever shall My love enfold thee; Never shalt thou lack Mine aid.
Neither Satan, war, nor stress Then shall mar thy happiness:
With this blessed consolation Be thou firm in tribulation."⁷ Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

⁶ John 11:25–26

⁷ Zion Mourns in Fear and Anguish TLH 268:5

Prayer of the Church
Twenty-first Sunday after Trinity
24 October 2021

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs. Lord God, King Almighty, the whole world is in Your power. We thank You for the many blessings of creation, which You sustain despite every ravage of sin, death and the devil. Help us to receive Your benefits with gratitude, knowing they come through Jesus' merits and not our own. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Defend Your Church against the schemes of the devil. Equip Your Church, and especially all pastors, with the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, that Your creation may be recalled from futility back to its Creator. Outfit Your saints with the full armor of God, with salvation, faith, peace, righteousness, truth and every benefit that comes from Christ Jesus, that we may be able to stand firm to the end. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Almighty God, You have created us male and female and commanded us to be fruitful, exercising wise dominion over this world. Bless all Christian households. Preserve Your holy estate of marriage. Do not let life or children be despised among us, but honored and protected. As You have created us in Your image, so lead us to live godly lives in accord with Your design, content as Your redeemed creatures. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, You have said by Your apostle that we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, authorities and cosmic powers over this present darkness, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Lead us to respect godly authorities, to oppose what stands against Your Word and to see every unbelieving person as Your creature for whom Christ has died. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Loving Father, we give thanks that in Holy Baptism we receive forgiveness of sins, deliverance from death and the devil, and eternal salvation, bless those who celebrate baptismal anniversaries this week, especially, *Alivia, Elijah, Major, Nina, and Kaitlynn*, grant that by Your Word and Spirit they may faithfully keep the covenant into which they have been called, boldly confess their Savior, and finally share with all Your saints the joys of eternal life; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, You have promised to send Your holy angels to guard and keep Your children. We thank and praise You for the gift of life and for the protection and care you have provided as *Chris, Joshua, Cheryl, and Cole* celebrate their birthdays. Grant that they may grow in grace, continue to know Your loving-kindness, abide in the confession of Your care and protection, serve You faithfully all the days of their life and finally come to the fullness of Your joys in heaven; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, do not despise our prayers because of our weak faith. Grant life and healing to those who are troubled in body or soul, the sick and recovering, the lonely and downtrodden, *especially Carmen, Marvin, Ruth, Zoey, Donna, Floyd, David, Mark, Joyce, and those we name in our hearts*. Free us from all adversities to serve You devoutly in all good works. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O God, You rested on the Sabbath and established it for Your ancient people as a commemoration of Your creative work. Do not let us forget that it is You, Lord, who sanctifies us. Give us rest in Your gifts, especially the sanctifying body and blood of Christ in His blessed Sacrament. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Into Your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

