

How to Believe

Luke 24:13-35

Friends some of you may know that before I moved out to Calgary I ran my own home improvement business for five years – painting, tiling, drywall, even did a couple of complete kitchen renovations, and so far none of work has shown up on Mike Holmes' TV show.

Actually in all seriousness I knew what I was doing, and if I didn't I was quick to learn how by asking for advice from other trades people, looking on the internet, or buying some How-to Books from Home Depot.

So I learned how to tile, how to install drywall, insulation, trim, crown molding, cabinetry and other things by reading these books, looking at the pictures and following the step by step instructions. A little bit of trial and error and I had it figured out.

In fact if you want to do something that you haven't done before you can find a How-to book for pretty much anything.

How-to cook Chinese, How-to Quilt, How-to make Stained Glass, How-to Ski and even How-to Skydive.

Now it's one thing to read a book on flooring, follow some steps and with some trial and error learn how to put down tile and do a half decent job at it.

I'm not so sure about reading a book on Skydiving....

Following these five easy steps... and with some trial and error... learning how to Skydive.

Its one of those things, like open heart surgery, that requires a bit more than some light reading and a couple of practice runs in order to learn how to do it. You can't afford to figure it out with some trial and error.

You know friends, faith can be like skydiving and open heart surgery in that way as well.

I say this because I was struck by one of the statements made by the two men we read about in the scripture this morning.

As they are walking along, describing to Jesus the events which had just occurred, one of them says – but...**we had hoped**...that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.

The bible's definition of faith is - *"being sure of what we hope for, and certain of what we do not see"*

These men had believed that Jesus was going to be the one who would redeem Israel – but it appeared that they had hoped in vain. Jesus did not take political power, organize an army and free Israel from Roman occupation – instead he was executed by them.

This is why faith or believing in something doesn't work very well by trial and error, because if you put your faith in something that disappoints you, if you get your hopes up – only to be let down, you gradually begin to lose faith.

If you are tiling and you make a mistake you can correct it – you learn from your mistakes, but with believing in something your mistakes discourage you and make you cynical. Just ask any Leafs fan!

So what are we doing then talking about "How to believe" this morning? Well friends, I think that its easy to go through Easter – and celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, be dramatically impacted by the power of these events, but then like these disciples we fizzle out in our faith afterwards because the ordinary everyday sets in again, and the experience of Easter gradually disappears like the leftover turkey in the fridge.

That's why this year our Easter series is a month long. We're not stopping with Easter Sunday because we want the power of Easter to continue to grow our faith and our trust in Jesus Christ.

But how does that happen after Easter? Well let's learn from what the scriptures tell us in this account of the disciples on the Road to Emmaus.

So we go back to last Sunday – Easter Sunday, for this is when these events take place and we find two of Jesus' followers leaving Jerusalem.

It's not exactly clear why they are leaving Jerusalem, if they had given up now that Jesus was dead. It seems that they were willing to wait around for three days, perhaps these two had remembered that Jesus had said he would be resurrected after three days, and they believed it was possible - Jewish superstition believed that the soul remained in the body for three days after death, so now here it is the third day - no Jesus, no soul in the body, not likely that he would come back and take power to defeat Rome.

So as I said it's not exactly clear why they are leaving Jerusalem, but it is clear that they are having an animated and lively discussion as they walk along.

And then they meet a stranger on the road, who is traveling in the same direction as they are. Coming up from behind them, he can see the discussion going on- hand gestures, perhaps they stop from time to time. So when he overtakes them he asks "what are you talking about?"

"Who is this stranger" they wonder? Only someone who has been living under a rock for the past three days wouldn't know what's been going on in Jerusalem.

Well the fact is that this person has been living under a rock for the past three days – it's Jesus! But they don't recognize him, in fact the scripture says they were kept from recognizing him.

What's going on here? Two things.

1) They are kept from recognizing Jesus' physical appearance because before Easter they couldn't, or didn't want to see what the scriptures had foretold about how the messiah had to suffer and die. This is a very different Christ than the one they were looking for, and possibly still expecting – so they don't recognize him.

2) Second and perhaps more applicable to us is that Jesus is setting a precedent of how people will become his followers from now on.

So the next thing Jesus does is teach these men who had been his followers the truth about what the messiah came to do and how he would do it from the scriptures.

Vs. 27 reads “and beginning with Moses (the first five books of the bible) and all the prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc...) he explained to them what was said in all the scriptures concerning himself”

You know, sometimes we might think we were gypped out of something by the fact that we have to follow Jesus without having the benefit of having been around him while he was on earth. Well, according to this scripture it didn't make much difference.

Even when Jesus was on earth – if you didn't know the scriptures well, you wouldn't really know him, and that wasn't about to change. Jesus himself had to take these followers through the Old Testament in order for them to properly understand who He was and what His mission was about.

You see friends, many people will agree with the two men on the road in this story – Jews, Muslims, and Hindus can all agree that Jesus was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. Even secular scholars of history or psychology will say he was a remarkable person who embodied the divine and was tragically crucified.

So in terms of looking at How to believe – what we see here is that the scriptures – are vitally important in *correctly* understanding who Jesus is as the Messiah, God's chosen one.

Do you want to continue to believe in the Son of God after Easter has come and gone? Are you looking for a way to become confident in our relativistic culture about who Jesus was? – Now is the time to pick up a bible – get the NIV Study Bible version from Chapters, or the Bible Society, and start reading from the beginning to better understand all these events which we have just celebrated.

As you go along and have questions, you can see what the study notes at the bottom say, and if you have further questions write them down so you can ask me about them.

Because friends, as our story this morning points out to us – if you don't know Jesus from the scriptures...you don't know him at all! You won't recognize him!

But there's more to it than just investigating the bible, there are people who have PhD's in bible study who still miss the point.

So when the two men arrive at the town they have been traveling too, they invite Jesus to stay with them, they offer him hospitality. Now there can be many reasons why they may have done this, concern for the man's safety in traveling after dark, being polite and nice – but I think that they were so intrigued by what Jesus had been saying to them that they didn't want it to end. This trip was only a couple of hours long, who knows when Jesus had joined them on it, and how long he had been explaining it to them – they wanted to hear more, to continue to understand who the messiah was from the scripture.

So they invite Jesus to come and have dinner with them.

Friends you may find that as you read the bible to find out about Jesus that you have a hunger to read more and more of it. Like the men in the story you welcome it into your home, into your regular routine, you don't want to politely part ways with it – you need to know more, so you make some room and invite it in.

When you do this, when you have a hunger to read and find out who Jesus was from scripture, something happens.

When Jesus is invited to dinner by the men in our story, he sits down at the table – and he takes charge. Usually the host would break the bread and distribute it – but Jesus, the guest becomes the host.

So too we will find that the scriptures, as they give us the true understanding of Jesus Christ, start to direct the all affairs of our life, instructing us on what to believe, on what is true, giving us wisdom, guidance, and encouragement to live as believers in Christ.

As we Presbyterians are famous for saying “the scriptures are the only rule for faith and life”

But those scriptures need to come to life! A correct understanding of the Messiah is no good if the Messiah is still in the tomb or if His body is missing and there has been no resurrection to new life.

And living our lives according to the bible doesn't mean much if the we do not have the new life that the scriptures tell us the Messiah came to bring!

So when Jesus breaks the bread for dinner – his followers finally recognize him! He is alive, not only do they correctly understand who he was, now they can see that He has risen from the dead, full of new life, life that He wants to give to them.

It is this new life that Jesus gives them as He shares the bread. After all it was Jesus who said

“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.” (John 6:51)

Everything that Jesus has been saying and explaining to them about the Messiah from the scriptures comes to its focal point as they sit down to eat, and He breaks bread and serves them.

Now they understand, now they see; now they believe!

And isn't it wonderful how Jesus imparts this extra-ordinary new life to them in such an ordinary way as eating a meal. Some people believe that living a Christian life has to be other-worldly and ethereal, somber and sober. Friends – Jesus gives us the new life through Bread and Wine. Food, agriculture, baking, wine making, creativity, taste, sense, company, intimacy, celebration! What a life!

What we learn about Christ in the scriptures is lived out in our lives, and it gives life to our lives in all areas!

So, How to believe? How to put your faith in something that will not disappoint you, time after time and leave you cynical?

1. Start with reading the Scripture to find out the truth about who Jesus was and what He came to do

2. Let Christ give you new life by eating the Lord's Supper
3. Live out that new life, and the meaning of the Lord's Supper in Christian fellowship with people – get together and eat, celebrate, enjoy life, share each other's burdens, pray for each other, worship Christ together.

Friends, this is how to believe. It is how Christ himself led his followers to believe in him and give them new life,

So friends what do you need to do? Read the scriptures more,
Make sure that you celebrate the Lord's Supper each month,
share your life with your fellow Christians?

You can do something about that when you leave here today.
Don't let Easter fizzle out in your life. You know how to believe. Amen.