

## **It Takes More Than Belief**

June 15, 2014

Matthew 28:16-20

I think one of the most fascinating careers one could have would be that of the major television or newspaper reporter. To live a life of someone like Walter Cronkitt would be a fascinating life. To witness history unfold. To be a witness of the Normandy Invasion. To be a witness to Pearl Harbor. To be a witness to the Kennedy Assassination. To be a witness to the first launch of an American into orbit.

Imagine what it would be like to be a witness to the resurrection. Imagine how that would change your life.

Imagine what it would be like to be Mary, or John, or any of those people who walked into that graveyard, seen the tomb with the stone rolled away, and seen it empty.

Imagine how it would change your life forever.

It changed Peter's life. After the death of Jesus he was going to go back to his fishing nets. He was going to go back to his old life. Where else could he go? But the resurrection changed all of that.

It changed Paul's life. He wasn't even around on Easter Sunday. He was a devout Jew who did not believe at all. But he encountered the risen Lord long after Easter Sunday, and it changed his life forever.

But the first people who were witnesses to the resurrection were the guards who left confused and bewildered. They were bribed by the chief priests and scribes to tell others they had been asleep on their posts and the body had been stolen by the disciples while they had been asleep. They were willing to destroy their careers for the sake of the bribe. In fact, they were willing to risk death for the bribe, because sleeping on duty was punishable by death.

These guards had been the first to witness the resurrection. They had the best evidence. They knew beyond doubt. They had been there all night long. They knew no one had stolen the body. They knew Jesus had risen from the dead. They had to have known. They had to believe. But it wasn't enough.

It could have changed their lives. But it didn't. Because believing is never enough.

If believing is not enough, what then is enough?

Most of us believe in the resurrection. Most of us here today believe that Jesus lived and died and rose again.

That is why we are here. We are here because we believe.

But believing is never enough.

You must do more than just believe.

James said in his New Testament letter (James 2:17-20), "faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead... You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that-- and shudder."

In Matthew's Gospel, shortly after the resurrection, Jesus did not say, "Go out into all the world and make believers." He said, "Go out and make disciples."

There is a difference between being a believer and being a disciple. It is not enough to just believe. The guards believed. They knew. They had the best evidence. They were the only ones there at the moment of the resurrection. Everyone else came after and saw the empty tomb. But they were there when the body of Christ came back to life. They believed. But it made no difference.

It is never enough to just believe. You must become a disciple.

What does that mean? If believing is not enough, what is? How should our lives be different?

First, if the resurrection is to make a difference in our lives, then we should become a people of a community.

It is not enough to just believe. One must join a community of believers. It is impossible for a person to be a Christian alone.

When God created Adam, God looked at Adam and said, "It is not good for the man to be alone." (Genesis 2:18). We need others around us. We are meant to be part of a community of faith.

We need the nurture we receive from one another. In Proverbs (27:17) we are told, "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another."

When Jesus sent out his disciples, we are told in Mark 6:7 that he sent them out in groups of two. He never sent anyone out alone.

Paul said in Romans (14:7) "For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone."

So often Christians are described in the New Testament as being part of a body. A body is composed of arms and hands and fingers. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul wrote, (1 Cor 12:18-21), "As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!"

You need the rest of the members of this church. You cannot be a Christian in isolation. You

cannot be the Lone Ranger of Christians.

Granted, there are times when you want to be alone. Jesus himself prayed in the hours before his death in solitude. He went to the Garden to be alone with God. But even in that solitude, he was constantly going back to be with the disciples.

As a pastor, I often see the church respond to people in a crisis.

A man's wife dies. The church responds. People call on the telephone to see what they can do. Food is brought to the house. There are hugs and hands to hold. In the days and months that follow, the church members keep in contact. Comfort is given.

On the other hand, another church member experiences the death of a husband. The pastor is there, but the church is invisible. There may be one or two people who call, but there is not the outpouring of support found in the first crisis.

There is no comfort. There is bitterness.

What makes the difference?

The difference is not that one person is more loved than the other.

The difference is not that one person gave more money to the church than the other person.

The difference is not that one person had more power or respect.

I have seen this happen time and again. The difference is that one family is part of the church and the other is not.

Both believe.

But only one is a disciple.

It is not enough to believe.

You have to become part of the body of Christ. You have to become part of the church.

Solomon in his wisdom said in Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!"

In the New Testament Lesson, the first to believe in the resurrection are the guards, but they do nothing. They are afraid. The resurrection doesn't change their lives for the better. On the other hand, those who are changed were always drawn toward one another. They were part of a community, so when they believed in the resurrection, the first thing they did was to go and look for one another.

It is not enough to believe. You have to become a disciple.

Becoming a disciple means joining a church community and being part of that community. Being a disciple also means that we become a people who worship.

In the Psalms, there is a man who almost loses faith in God. He says (Ps 73), "As for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. They are free from the burdens common to man; they are not plagued by human ills. Therefore pride is their necklace; they clothe themselves with violence...This is what the wicked are like-- always carefree, they increase in wealth. Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence."

This man believes, but in this world of violence, injustice, and discouragement, belief is not enough. This man found faith strengthened through worship. He continues in his Psalm, "When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood."

In Matthew's Gospel, as soon as the disciples learn about the resurrection, they worship. (Matt 28:16-17) It is not enough to believe. One must also worship.

To be a disciple also means that we need to become a people who grow in our faith.

Paul tells us in his letter to the Colossians, "So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, (Colossians 3:1-2).

Many people believe, but they do not have the mind of the disciple. They do not focus their minds on Christ. They do not set their minds on spiritual things. They do not grow.

In the Old Testament, Moses leads the people out of Egypt and toward the promised land. That is not a trip made in an instant. That is a long journey. It takes 40 years. At the first sign of trouble, the Hebrews complain. "We should have stayed in Egypt." But God wants his people to move forward. God wants his people to grow. He does not want us to stay where we are. He doesn't want us to remain children.

One of the first things that happens after the resurrection is the disciples begin to grow. Their faith grows by listening to God's Word.

The Psalmist memorized Scripture so that he could always be nurtured by God's Word. "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." (Ps 119:11).

After the resurrection, disciples begin to turn toward Scripture.

In Luke, some of the disciples meet the risen Lord on the road to Emmaus. Jesus begins to

explain all of Scripture to them, beginning with the words of Moses. When they realized it is Jesus who has been raised from the dead, the disciples say to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:27-32).

Many of us here today will neglect God's Word. We believe. But it is not enough to believe.

We must join a church fellowship. We must worship. We must grow in faith through reading and studying God's Word.

We must also get up, go out of this sanctuary, and make a difference in the world out there.

In Matthew's Gospel, the disciples listened to Jesus after the resurrection. He said, "Go into all the world and make disciples."

We need to share the faith with others.

In Matthew's Gospel, when the women come to the grave and realize that Jesus has been raised from the dead, the angel says, "Go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you." (Matthew 28:7)

The news of the resurrection is not news that we keep silent. We tell others. We share it with others.

It is not enough to believe.

We all believe.

But are we all disciples?

James said in his New Testament letter, (James 2:19-20) "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that-- and shudder. You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?"

We all believe in the resurrection.

So did the guards at the tomb.

It made no difference in their lives.

It can make a difference in ours.

Let's do more than believe.

Let's become disciples.