

# Menifee United Church of Christ

Established in 1962 by God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit

## SERMON FOR

July 5, 2015

*“God Believes in You, Believe In Yourself”*



Reverend Bill Freeman: Senior Minister  
Eckart Seeber: Music Minister  
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Ray Hawkins: Lay Reader

## ***Menifee United Church of Christ***

*Sunday Service and Sunday School 10 AM*

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*Live Life Fully Alive!*

July 5, 2015  
"God Believes In You, Believe In Yourself"  
Rev. Bill Freeman

**Ezekiel 2:1-5**

*He said to me: O mortal, stand up on your feet, and I will speak with you. And when he spoke to me, a spirit entered into me and set me on my feet; and I heard him speaking to me. He said to me, Mortal, I am sending you to the people of Israel, to a nation of rebels who have rebelled against me; they and their ancestors have transgressed against me to this very day. The descendants are impudent and stubborn. I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD.' Whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house), they shall know that there has been a prophet among them.*

**Mark 6:1-6**

*He left that place and came to his home town, and his disciples followed him. On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, 'Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?' And they took offence at him. Then Jesus said to them, 'Prophets are not without honor, except in their home town, and among their own kin, and in their own house.' And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief.*

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*God Believes In You, Believe In Yourself*

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My Mom died several years ago. A couple years before that, she invited my two sisters, my brother, and me to go with her to a funeral home to help her plan her funeral. As we all sat in the Funeral Director's office, she asked one of my sisters, whose

husband is a minister, if her husband would do her funeral, because, my Mom said, "He's the only minister I know." My brother said, "Um, Mom, Bill's a minister." My Mom was all embarrassed, but it was okay.

She probably didn't always see me as a then 53-year-old minister. She probably sometimes saw me as a 5-year-old boy, running through the house with a cape on, pretending to be Superman. I can't really be upset about that. I sometimes do the same thing with my daughter. She's a 23-year-old paralegal living in Washington, DC. But I sometimes see her as a 5-year-old, playing Pretty, Pretty Princess with me, in our old house.

At my first church, people didn't really see me as a modern minister. They thought I'd tell them that what they learned in Sunday School 50 years before was still valid - like God is a white-bearded man sitting on a cloud someplace, loathing humankind. Instead I told them that Christianity had progressed over the past 50 years - seeing God as a spirit, loving humankind. They thought I'd tell them that they should take everything in the Bible literally - like the universe is 6,000 years old. Instead I told them that they should take everything in the Bible lovingly, but not always literally - like the universe is billions of years old. They thought I'd tell them that God hates gays and gay marriage. Instead I told them that God doesn't hate anybody, that God loves everybody, including two people in love, whether those two people are Adam and Eve or Adam and Steve.

Maybe people don't see you for who you are. Maybe people see you as who you used to be. Maybe your parents see you as a child, even though you're way past childhood. Even if people don't see you for who you are. Even if people do see you as who you used to be. Even if your parents do see you as a child, not as your adult self. Forgive them for they know not what they do. Take comfort in knowing: God sees you as you truly are. God believes in you. Believe in yourself.

Jesus travels to his hometown. On the sabbath he teaches in the synagogue. (Remember, Jesus was a rabbi, so it's perfectly fine for him to teach in the synagogue on the sabbath.) His boyhood neighbors, after hearing his teachings - which must have been

profound - said: "Who does this guy think he is? Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't this the son of Mary? Don't we know his brothers and sisters? He's not all that and a bag of chips." They weren't impressed. Then Jesus said, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house." And he couldn't do any big powerful miracles. All he could do was lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. And he was amazed by his boyhood neighbors' unbelief.

How blind must Jesus' boyhood neighbors have been? What did they think when he healed a few sick people? Did they think: "Big deal, Jesus. So you healed some people of the common cold. That doesn't impress us." And why weren't they impressed by Jesus' teachings? We don't know what he taught them. Maybe he taught them, "Blessed are you who are poor." Maybe he taught them, "Feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and welcome the stranger." Maybe he taught them, "Love your neighbor as yourself." How could they not be impressed by Jesus' teachings?

Maybe if Jesus wanted to impress his boyhood neighbors, instead of teaching them, "Blessed are you who are poor," he should have taught them, "God wants you to be rich! God wants you to live in a bigger house! God wants you to ride a bigger donkey!" Maybe if Jesus wanted to impress his boyhood neighbors, instead of teaching them, "Feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and welcome the stranger," he should have taught them, "Care only about yourself! Forget about everybody else!" Maybe if Jesus wanted to impress his boyhood neighbors, instead of teaching them, "Love your neighbor as yourself," he should have taught them, "Hate your neighbors. What have they ever done for you?!"

Of course, Jesus couldn't do that. Because he's Jesus. He knew who he was and whose he was. So his boyhood neighbors didn't believe in him. So what? Jesus didn't need his boyhood neighbors to believe in him. God believed in him. And Jesus believed in himself.

Jesus' parents took him to Jerusalem for the festival of the

Passover. Jesus was 12 years old. After the festival, when his parents headed home, Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents didn't know it. After a day's journey, his parents noticed that Jesus wasn't with them. Jesus was sort of like Macaulay Culkin in "Home Alone." His parents went back to Jerusalem looking for him. After three days they found him. They found him in the temple, listening to the teachers, or the rabbis, and asking them questions. Everyone was amazed by Jesus' understanding and his answers. But his parents said: Hey, Jesus, we were worried sick about you. But Jesus was unconcerned: Didn't you know I'd be in my Father's house?

Maybe Jesus was studying for his Bar Mitzvah, which comes these days when a Jewish child is 13 years old. But this seems to be more than just Jesus studying for his Bar Mitzvah. We're to understand that Jesus wasn't just a student, learning from the rabbis, Jesus was also a teacher, teaching the rabbis. But his parents didn't seem to understand that. Or maybe his parents didn't want to understand that. Maybe his parents didn't want to see Jesus for who he was. Maybe his parents didn't want to see Jesus as a messiah, a prophet, a savior. Maybe they just wanted to see Jesus as a normal boy. A son. Not a Son of God.

Ezekiel, the prophet in the Hebrew scriptures, is called on by God to go to the people of Israel and speak the word of God to them. The people of Israel have rebelled against God. So God wants Ezekiel to go to them and set them straight. Ezekiel is to say to them, "Thus says the Lord God." Whether they hear Ezekiel or refuse to hear Ezekiel, they'll know that there has been a prophet among them.

That must've been difficult for Ezekiel. People might refuse to hear what he had to say, even if what he had to say was coming straight from God. But people might not believe that it's possible for a message from God to come through him. Who was he? He was just a mere mortal. Maybe they saw him more as a mess, than a messenger. Certainly not a messenger from God. Maybe he even had his own doubts. But he shouldn't doubt. God uses people in the Bible to deliver God's messages. Why couldn't God use Ezekiel to deliver God's messages? God believes in Ezekiel. And Ezekiel had to believe in himself.

How can you know that God believes in you? Because the Bible says so. In the Book of Genesis: God created humankind in God's image and God blessed them. In other words: You are created in the image of God. You are blessed by God. You are a child of God. So, if God created you in the image of God, if God blessed you, and if you are a child of God, then God must believe in you. Just like I believe in my daughter and other parents believe in their children. (And hopefully we all see our children as they truly are, just as God sees us as we truly are.)

What does it mean to believe in yourself? Certainly it doesn't mean to be arrogant. Certainly it doesn't mean to be egotistical. Certainly it doesn't mean to be self-centered. It means to have confidence in your abilities. It means to have the courage of your convictions. And it also means to cooperate with others. After all: Just as you are created in the image of God, so is everyone else. Just as you are blessed by God, so is everyone else. And just as you are a child of God, so is everyone else. God believes in you, yes. And God believes in everyone else, too. So, everyone else should believe in themselves. And you should believe in yourself.

When you give people a message from God, how can you know that it's actually a message from God? First John says, "God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them." So if your message is filled with love, then it must be from God, because God is love. On the other hand, if your message is filled with hate, then it can't be from God, because, again, God is love.

How do you get people to listen to what you have to say? You can't. To modify an old saying just slightly: You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him think. You're like Ezekiel in the Hebrew scriptures. And you're like Jesus in his hometown. All you can do is give people the loving word of God. It's up to them as to whether or not they hear it and heed it.

Sara Bareilles had a hit song a few years ago that I think speaks to our topic. The song is entitled, "Brave." Sara Bareilles sings, "Say what you want to say: And let the words fall out. Honestly

I want to see you be brave.” Be brave, and say what you want to say.

“The Bucket List,” is the movie starring Jack Nicholson and Morgan Freeman. They play two guys who are terminally ill. So they make a list of what they want to do before they, “Kick the bucket.” And then they go and do what’s on their bucket list. They go skydiving. They go flying over the North Pole. They go riding motorcycles on the Great Wall of China. I hope you go and do what’s on your bucket list.

I believe God has given me a message to give to you today - just like Ezekiel. So I’m just going to proclaim it, and hope that you hear it and heed it. Whatever it is that you want to say, say it - with love. Whatever it is that you want to do, do it - with love. Remembering that: God believes in you. So: Believe in yourself.

Let us pray...

*God of Love,  
Help us to say what you want us to say.  
Help us to do what you want us to do.  
Help us to know that you believe in us.  
And help us to believe in ourselves.  
Now and forevermore.  
By the power of the Holy Spirit.  
And in the name of Jesus.  
Amen.*

## THE GOLDEN RULE

*What is hateful to you  
do not do to others.*

Judaism

*Do to others what you would  
have them do to you.*

Christianity

*None of you believes until he wishes for his  
brother what he wishes for himself.*

Islam

*Do not do to others  
what would cause pain if done to you.*

Hinduism

*Hurt not others in ways that you yourself  
would find hurtful.*

Buddism

*Regard your neighbor's gain as your gain,  
and your neighbor's loss as your loss.*

Taoism

*Do not do to others  
what you do not want them to do to you.*

Confucianism

*Treat other people  
as you'd want to be treated in their situation.*

Humanism