

Menifee United Church of Christ

Established in 1962 by God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit

SERMON FOR

August 2, 2015

“Believing In Jesus Is Not Enough”



Reverend Bill Freeman: Senior Minister
Eckart Seeber: Music Minister
Marie Paulus-Nyquist: Children’s Minister
Lucia Gallo: Lay Reader

Menifee United Church of Christ

Sunday Service and Sunday School 10 AM

*26701 McCall Boulevard,
Menifee, California 92586
(951) 679-1149*

Email: uccmenifee@gmail.com

Website: menifeeucc.org

Live Life Fully Alive!

August 2, 2015
“Believing In Jesus Is Not Enough”
Rev. Bill Freeman

Ephesians 4:11-16

The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people’s trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knitted together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body’s growth in building itself up in love.

John 6:28-35;

Then they said to him, ‘What must we do to perform the works of God?’ Jesus answered them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.’ So they said to him, ‘What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, “He gave them bread from heaven to eat.”’ Then Jesus said to them, ‘Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.’ They said to him, ‘Sir, give us this bread always.’ Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

Believing In Jesus Is Not Enough

In the movie, “Bull Durham,” Susan Sarandon asks Kevin Costner, who plays a minor league baseball catcher, “What do you believe in...?” I’ll clean this up for church, but Kevin Costner says, “Well, I believe in the soul...the hanging curveball, high fiber, good Scotch...I believe Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone, I believe there ought to be a Constitutional Amendment outlawing AstroTurf and the Designated Hitter, I believe in the sweet spot...[and] opening your presents Christmas morning rather than Christmas Eve.” It’s one of the most memorable moments in the movies.

What does it mean to “believe in” something? True sports fans believe in their team no matter what. Whether it’s the Cubs or the Mets, the Lakers or the Clippers, the Seahawks or the Patriots, the Maple Leafs or the Red Wings. Whether they’re winning or losing, whether they’re up or down, whether they’re in first place or cellar dwellers. True sports fans believe in their team no matter what.

What do you believe in? Do you believe in something one day and then believe in something completely different the next day? Do you believe in seemingly contradictory ideas? Do you believe in the sanctity of life and the death penalty? Do you believe in peace and a just war? Do you believe in Christianity as one of many paths to God?

The late Robert Schuller, back when he was the head of the Crystal Cathedral, held an annual Leadership Conference at his church. An anonymous donor paid for students from my seminary to attend. I thought: Come to California from Michigan in January? Count me in! It was an impressive conference. One day, during our free time, my classmates and I decided to go to the mall. I was sitting way in the back of our rented van. When we got to the mall parking lot, my classmates all turned around, looked at me, and demanded to know: “Are you a Christian?” Homina, homina, homina. I said, “Well, yeah. I go to a Christian seminary.” They said, “Right. But we know you’re a liberal. So, do you believe in Jesus?” I wasn’t completely sure what that

meant back then, but I said, “I believe Jesus was a hundred percent human and a hundred percent divine.” They said, “That’s good enough for us. Let’s go shopping.” It was kinda weird.

What does it mean to “believe in” Jesus? Some would say you have to believe in the miraculous milestones of Jesus’ life: You have to believe in Jesus being born of a virgin mother. You have to believe in Jesus dying for your sins. And you have to believe in Jesus rising from the dead. Some would say you have to believe in the miracles attributed to Jesus: You have to believe in Jesus walking on water. You have to believe in Jesus healing the sick. And you have to believe in Jesus raising the dead. Some would say you have to believe in the theological claims about Jesus: You have to believe in Jesus as the Son of God. You have to believe in Jesus as the King of Kings. You have to believe in Jesus as your Lord and Savior.

Jesus was being followed by a crowd. This was right after he’d fed the 5,000. He told the crowd that they just wanted to be with him because he’d fed them food, but he said that food perishes. What they needed was food that endures for eternal life. Jesus called that food, “the bread of God...which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.” Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” It’s good that this passage comes along on Communion Sunday.

Some preachers take Jesus’ words quite literally. Some preachers preach that all you need to do is “believe in” Jesus and you have achieved salvation. Some preachers preach that if you just “believe in” Jesus, you don’t have to do anything else ever again, you are assured a place in heaven. Some preachers preach that if you “believe in” and love Jesus and accept Jesus into your heart, you are good to go for all eternity.

Some preachers preach that to “believe in” Jesus is not enough. Some preachers preach that you also have to “believe” Jesus’ teachings - “Love your neighbor,” “Love your enemies,” “Forgive and you will be forgiven,” “Judge not and you will not

be judged,” and, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” - and then you will achieve salvation when you “believe” what Jesus teaches and do that.

Which set of preachers is correct? Do you just have to “believe in” Jesus and you’ll find yourself on the highway to heaven? Or do you have to “believe” Jesus when he basically prescribes the words of the prophet Micah - do justice and love kindness - and then you’ll have a one-way ticket to somewhere over the rainbow? Let’s look at what some holy folks have said.

Pope Francis recently blew the minds of many Catholics. He’s been doing that since he first came to the Vatican a couple years ago. Pope Francis said, “The Lord has redeemed all of us, all of us, with the Blood of Christ: all of us, not just Catholics. Everyone! ‘Father, the atheists?’ Even the atheists. Everyone!” Pope Francis added, “If we...[us and the Atheists]...do good to others...we will meet one another there,” in heaven. Wow! What Pope Francis is saying is, it’s not so important to “believe in” Jesus, but to “believe” what Jesus teaches and do good. But I know this is a Protestant crowd, so let’s see what someone else has to say.

James founded the church in Jerusalem. James had immense credibility, because he was the brother of Jesus. James wrote the letter of James, which Luther called, “An epistle of straw,” probably because of one statement in the letter. James wrote, “So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.” In other words, it’s not enough just to “believe in” Jesus, you also have to “believe” what Jesus teaches and do good. Luther thought faith alone was all that matters. Let’s hear from one more person on this topic.

Jesus himself talked about those who “believe in” him, and those who “believe” what he teaches and do good. Jesus asked, “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I tell you?” And Jesus said, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.” In other words: Believing in Jesus is not enough. You also have to believe what Jesus teaches and do good.

The beauty of being in a United Church of Christ church: You are free to choose to “believe in” Jesus or you are free to choose to “believe” Jesus. No one will judge you, either way. But...I would suggest that you do both, that you “believe in” Jesus - that you love him and accept him into your heart - and that you “believe” what Jesus teaches and do good.

It’s easier to “believe in” Jesus than it is to “believe” what Jesus teaches and do good. To “believe in” Jesus, you just have to see Jesus as holy and love him. To “believe” Jesus, you have to see everyone as holy and love them.

It’s like the Apostle Paul says in his letter to the Ephesians. God gives us “gifts...to equip the saints [us] for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us” become like Jesus. Are we really saints? Well, God sees us that way, especially when we become like Jesus.

So, “believe in” Jesus by loving him and accepting him into your heart. Then, when you do that, you will want to “believe” what Jesus teaches and do good. And then, at the end of your life, when Jesus welcomes you into heaven, God will say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

It’s like the hymn, “They’ll know we are Christians by our love.” Yes, they will. And they’ll know we are Christians, not just by our love for Jesus, or by our love for each other, but by our love for everyone.

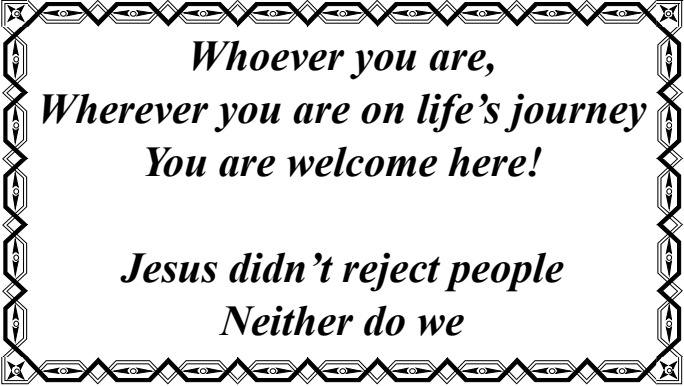
With Pope Francis, I believe they’ll know Atheists by their love, too. And they’ll know Jews and Hindus, and Buddhists and Muslims by their love, also. Because as a United Church of Christ minister, I believe all of humankind has a finite number of paths to God. And I believe God has an infinite number of paths to all of humankind.

I hope I know a little more today than I did a decade or so ago, when I came to California for the first time to attend Robert Schuller’s Leadership Conference, back when my classmates wondered whether I “believe in” Jesus. So now that I live and minister in California, I can honestly say that I do “believe in”

Jesus, by loving him and accepting him into my heart (where he's always resided). And I also "believe" what Jesus teaches - "Love your neighbor," "Love your enemies," "Forgive and you will be forgiven," "Judge not and you will not be judged," and, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" - and while I may not always succeed at it, I try to do what Jesus teaches. My hope for you is that you, too, try to do what Jesus teaches. Then you and I, and Pope Francis and Atheists, and each and every last one of us will one day go from the here and now to the hereafter.

Let us pray...

*God of Love,
Help us to "believe in" Jesus.
Help us to "believe" what Jesus teaches.
And help us to do what Jesus teaches.
Now and forevermore.
By the power of the Holy Spirit.
And in the name of Jesus.
Amen.*



*Whoever you are,
Wherever you are on life's journey
You are welcome here!*

*Jesus didn't reject people
Neither do we*

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