

Service for Personal Use – 8th May 2022

Belief [biˈli:f] - an acceptance that something exists or is true, especially one without proof.

God, use these words, these moments of sharing, this time of reflection, as a point of connection into our hearts. Speak to us, share your power with us and help us to know your presence close. Amen.

We begin together by sharing in **Singing the Faith 314, H&P 213**. This joyful Eastertide!

We pray -

God tells us to Be.

Be faithful. Be hopeful. Be joyful.

God tells us to Be.

Be confident. Be calm. Be kind.

God tells us to Be.

Be servants. Be Prophets. Be Witnesses.

Be filled with the Spirit. Be inspired by the Good News. Be Christ like in all things.

God tells us to Be.

God tells us to Believe.

And as an expression of our beliefs we join, in the version that we feel most comfortable with, in the **Lord's Prayer**.

The passage that I have based this service on is **John 10: 22 – 30**

Let us pray

Lord God, this creation is in your hands, this world is under your care, our lives are under your protection. You are master of everything and

nothing can snatch us from your hand. We come to you now, and we offer our prayers for those people and situations where we know there is a need at this time.

For every friend who is in pain. For every colleague who feels helpless or hopeless. For every family member who feels they are sinking under the storms of life. For those that have opened up to us about their problems, for those that remain closed to us but our instincts tell us that they are in need. We pause, and we bring these people to you, and we ask for your power in their lives.

For every news report that brings us to tears. For all of those people in the world whose situation breaks our hearts. For everything that makes us cry out in frustration at the unfairness of our human decisions. For everything we hear about injustice, intolerance, persecution and violence. We pause, and we bring these things to you, and we ask for your power in our world.

For every situation in which we can make a difference. For every moment that we can shape and influence. We ask that you will grant us the gifts that we need to be the ally, the light, the source of hope and the example of love, wisdom and kindness. We pause, and we bring our lives to you, and we ask for your power in all that we are, and all that we can be.

Amen.

We join together with a hymn of confidence in God's protection, **Singing the Faith 649.**

The Lectionary reading for this week talks a lot about belief. Jesus tells his audience twice, in verse 25 "Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe!" and again in verse 26 "but you do not believe because you are not my sheep." They seem to be asking for something more than he has already done, even though he has walked amongst them for some time and has already been working miracles and preaching the Good News to them. They seem to be asking for him to make another statement, to prove himself once more to them. They imply that this time, with this proof, they will definitely believe in him and proclaim him as Messiah but Jesus seems doubtful that this will ever happen. "You are

not my Sheep” he says, clearly knowing them better than they perhaps knew themselves.

Why did they not believe? What made it impossible for them to believe in Christ, despite all of the works that we can read about in the first ten chapters of John? Was it because they simply did not want to believe, or was it because Christ’s voice was just one of many that they had in their lives and they simply didn’t know which of these voices to believe? Were they surrounded by contrary voices – the cautionary voices of the Roman authorities warning of the consequences of rebellion, the conservative voices of the Jewish leaders, worried about their status and their positions of power, the concerned voices of their friends and families, worried that they might fall under the spell of this maverick, dangerous preacher? Were they under siege from all these different voices telling them different things?

I think many of us can relate to this. It will not take you long, with an internet connection or with the willingness to visit a selection of the many Christian churches in Leeds, to find different voices even within the Christian faith, that speak of different ways to worship, different ways to believe and different ways to live faith. Personally, I think this is a blessing – it is a strength of our faith that one doctrine does not utterly dominate and silence all others – but it can be very confusing when it comes to deciding exactly what to believe. We can sometimes feel like we have somehow strayed from Christ’s flock because we hold *this* belief, or we prefer *this* particular way of doing things.

I would simply suggest we take this back to basics. I would suggest that what matters is how we find ways to listen to the one voice that matters. This is unlikely to be a voice on Gogglebox. This probably isn’t going to be from a party political broadcast, although in some ways I could be happy if it was. This isn’t the voice that sells the most books, or the voice that tells the best anecdote on a Sunday morning in church, or the voice with the most Instagram followers. Those voices are not the voice of the owner of the flock.

I would suggest that when we are bemused and baffled by all the voices that speak to us in our lives, we actively pause for a few moments, and reflect on our process of discernment. How do we calm the storm? How do we tune out the cacophony of competing influences and opinions? This might be through reflection on a verse of scripture or through silence and stillness, it might be through contemplation of a particular

image. Whatever it is, if it helps us to concentrate our hearing onto the one voice that matters, and the one truth that matters, then this is a hugely important part of how we strengthen and sharpen our belief in the message of Christ Jesus. It will help us to remember that our place is in his flock, in his hands, in his eternal kingdom. It will support us as we deal with the here and now, and it will sustain us as we travel towards the forever after.

We pray together now, as we reflect on how we respond to all the different voices that we hear in our lives.

Lord, we pray that your voice will be the voice that guides us in everything we do, in every choice that we make, in every path that we choose.

We pray that it will be your voice that is heard above all of the quiet murmurs, the confident shouts, the sly rumours, the insistent doubts, the self-inflicted contradictions of prejudice and selfishness.

We pray that every word that we speak can be an expression of your love, your mercy, your kindness and your wisdom. We pray that everything we say, and everything we do, can be to your glory.

Take our lives, Lord, cleanse them from our past mistakes and misjudgements, and reset our path again, so that we can be the servants that you have created us to be. Revive us, and set us once more onto the path that leads to our place in the eternal kingdom.

In Christ's name, amen.

We close this shared space with the words of Samuel Medley in **Singing the Faith 303, H&P 196, MP 278.**