

**Believe!**  
**Week 4: John 4:43-54**  
March 2, 2014

Welcome/introduction

Before we jump into what we're going to talk about today, want to do a quick wrap-up to some family business we've been doing over the past four weeks or so

Four weeks ago I stood up here and explained how we were looking to hire another pastor to do all sorts of great things and to help us to continue to grow well and care for folks.

But then as we looked at our giving pattern for the past six months or so it was all over the place and we weren't sure we could afford to make the hire

So we asked that if you were a part of this community and if you were willing to tell us, if you would let us know what your giving intentions were so that we could make a wise decision moving forward about hiring or not hiring.

We're in a great place financially right now, we don't want to put the church in a bad place financially

I told you that what we needed to keep the budget exactly as it is and add the new person on was \$27,000/month

And our average has been \$21,000/month.

We were hoping to close this gap and we asked you to fill out those intention cards and let us know what you're planning to give monthly so we could make a good decision

First off, let me say that our response rate was great—57 households responded with some sort of card, so thank you very much for your willingness to let us know what you were planning to give and for your generosity in doing so.

And the total monthly amount indicated on the cards was \$20,121

So that still leaves about the same sizeable gap, maybe even a bit larger, between our income and our projected expending if we hire someone

Some comments and next steps:

1. Of course we were hoping that we might be able to close this gap just a bit more. If you've been in and out over the past couple of weeks and didn't get a

chance to submit a giving intention card but you would like to, that'd be helpful for us! Just email the finance team at [finance@chathamchurch.org](mailto:finance@chathamchurch.org).

2. On the other hand, we feel great about this as our 'floor' meaning that we expect most months to be higher than this

For example, during the last four weeks in the month of February as we discussed all of this and we were collecting the Giving intention Cards that added up to intentions of \$20,000/month, we received \$24,000 in offerings!

We said we'd give \$20,000, we gave \$24,000! That's about how we expect things to go.

3. We are very committed to having a balanced budget and not putting us in a place that is financially irresponsible or dangerous—we want to be both wise and faithful stewards of the resources God has given us
4. Since we talked about all of this four weeks ago, we've had a number of people on the finance team and deacons and elders all doing deep dives and serious analytics on our giving patterns and history and trends and trajectories

And the good news is that we're consistently adding the number of donors each month, not by the dozens, but the number of folks giving each month is slowly growing.

Overall, if you look at the big picture of the past 9 months or so, we are trending in the right direction

5. At the same time, we've been taking a hard look at our budget for this fiscal year and asked the question what's **essential** for our ministries and what's more **optional**

So for example, we have to pay rent here at Woods, that's essential, but our mailers 3 times per year are more optional and we could make cuts there

Our fiscal year runs from July 1 to June 30, so March is the time of year where we're starting to roll up our sleeves and evaluate our budget anyway, we've just started a couple of weeks early this year

And we feel good that we can get that number down from \$27,000/month to as low as \$22,000/month if we absolutely had to.

So we're going to continue to work on the budget over the next several weeks and we'll be submitting a budget for y'all's approval sometime in early May.

6. We have good savings! We've got a solid amount of money in savings that is the result of God's graciousness, your generosity, and good stewardship on behalf of the church from even before I got here.

And we believe that the money there is a good gift given to us to be used in appropriate ways and at the appropriate time

And we're considering dipping into it as a temporary bridge to help us if we should need it in the first few months of a hire.

We wouldn't do that if there wasn't a good track record of increased giving that we think will eventually close that gap

But all our recent history over the past 9 months or so suggests that we will have closed any gap within a reasonable period of time.

So we are okay with running a small monthly deficit for a few months if need be while our giving catches up with our expenses and shrinks that gap until it's closed

7. Lastly, before I came here about a year and a half ago, I worked for a campus ministry where I had to raise all my own support. I raised almost \$100,000 a year for stuff like salary, insurance, travel expenses—the whole budget

The person we're talking to about coming here is currently also with that organization and is currently fundraising all of his budget as well.

One proposal is that if we make this hire and we do not see an increase in our giving over the next several months, that he and I will take whatever our monthly gap is and go and raise it ourselves.

In other words, if we're running a \$4,000/month deficit, I'll go raise \$2,000/month and he'll go raise \$2,000/month. It's not nothing but it's definitely less than either one of us has had to raise before.

We've run this by the candidate and he's open to doing this although obviously for both of us we'd rather not add that to our plates.

8. We've got a great candidate!

We've been moving forward with our candidate over the past couple of weeks and we are very, very, very encouraged that we might have found someone who could be the perfect match for Chatham and Chatham church

And we'll be talking to you more about him as a candidate next week.

And as we've prayed and crunched numbers and talked with the candidate, we've decided as a team of elders, deacons, and some help from finance, that we're going to move ahead with this process.

If you've got any questions or concerns about all of this, feel free to talk to me or any of the other elders, our names and emails are listed in the bulletin.

Thus endeth the family business meeting, you may now start your sermon clock!

We are in our fourth week of working through a chunk of the book of John

If you're new to the Bible, there are four biographies we have of Jesus' life and John is one of those, he was one of Jesus' original twelve followers and wrote one of the most detailed accounts of Jesus' life

We're going through the book of John in 6-8 week chunks at a time meaning we should be done at some point in the next 3 to 14 years!

And this section of John that we're going to camp out in for the next eight weeks or so has this key big word that comes up over and over again and that is BELIEVE

And what we've said is that there's a couple things about this whole believing thing:

1. Essential to Christianity: There's no real Christianity without it.
2. An obstacle to Christianity: Belief is hard at some point for almost all of us

For some of you, you've never been able to clear this initial hump of believing

Others of us have believed easily or for a long time but then at some point something happens, crisis or situation or just a season of doubt and suddenly it's not so easy to believe any more

And some of us despair of the whole belief thing because for some of us believing in anything just doesn't come all that naturally or we're resistant

But what we're going to find over the next several weeks as we read these stories of Jesus is that the people he came in contact with had the same obstacles we have when it comes to believing

And what we're going to find is that Jesus delights to meet people in the midst of whatever their belief-hang-up, whatever their obstacle is

And the good news for us this morning, is that Jesus isn't afraid of our obstacles, our doubts, our questions

## We BRING THE QUESTIONS WITH US

Because what we find is that Jesus is the MASTER and taking and leveraging honest questions and using those as an opportunity to pour out more grace and more truth that then develops into real faith

This morning we're going to see Jesus interact with a man and the obstacle or dilemma that this man is going to face is similar to the one that many of us face when it comes to believing in Jesus

Jesus is going to ask him to believe him and trust him *without first seeing* the outcome that he wants to see.

For many of us, this is the rub, isn't it? Taking someone at their word is a risky proposition!

I got lunch a week and a half ago with a guy that took his wife at her word that she didn't really want him to do ANYTHING for Valentine's day.

She said not to worry about it, he took her at her word

And then Valentine's Day arrived and suddenly he discovered that this was one of those times when he should have NOT taken her at her word!

Men, quick aside, no matter what she says about birthday or Valentine's day or whatever, she actually DOES want you to at least acknowledge the day!

In our world, we very rarely can take one another at each other's words, can we? You go to the bank, you SAY that you can pay back the loan—they say, that's nice, what kind of collateral do you have?

We have marriage ceremonies where people make HUGE promises to each other, give each other their word to cherish and love forever and ever and ever and SAY all kinds of goopy Valentine's day-kind of stuff

But all of us have either experienced this first hand or had front-row seats to what happens in a family as promises made and words given are broken

And so we live in an insecure world where it's really, really hard to take other people at their word  
and very many of them are not worthy of our trust, not worthy of believing, have patterns in their lives that indicate that they should not be trusted or taken at their word

And then we come to Jesus.

And he makes these incredible promises.

And he calls us into a crazy counter-cultural life of loving our enemies and laying down our lives for him and for others

And he says that the only way for us to really know and experience real life is to die to ourselves and our own agendas for our lives and follow him into a life that he will not give us a script for, just the next step for

And we have to decide, will we take Jesus at his word.  
Is he telling us the truth?

AND not only is he telling us the truth about who God the Father is and how life should be lived

Does he have the power and authority to deliver on the promises he's making?

Anybody can make promises, but you can only deliver on the promises that you have the sphere of authority to deliver on.

So I could promise you that if you went straight after church to McDonald's after the service that you can get free McNuggets if you breakdance for the cashier  
but I have no authority or power to deliver on that promise

Jesus promises us that if we will trust in him, we will be adopted back into the family of God, be forgiven of our sins and the stuff that alienates us from God, and be reconciled with God our Father

And then he calls us to live a life that NONE of us would choose to live if it were just up to us and our own comfort and convenience and preferences, left to our own devices.

And the question is:

a) does he have the authority and power and ability to do all of this crazy cosmic reconciling work that he promises he can do and

b) ultimately, the big question is this: is Jesus telling us what is true? Can we trust him? Does he hold the secrets to real life?

These are the **first** questions you have to answer if you're here and you're on a faith journey of some sort trying to figure out what's true

**AND** these are the question that you have to face every single time you come up to a situation where YOU want to do ONE THING and the BIBLE tells you to do something else.

Is Jesus and his way—is that reliable? Can that way be trusted?

If you've got a Bible, turn with me to John 4; if not it'll be on the screen behind me. If you don't have a Bible at all, we'd love to give you a Bible, free ones on the resource table along with some great books for sale—check that table out

***<sup>43</sup> After the two days he departed for Galilee. <sup>44</sup> (For Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his own hometown.) <sup>45</sup> So when he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, having seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the feast. For they too had gone to the feast.***

Pause there—back in John chapter 2 which we read last fall John records that Jesus went up to Jerusalem for the Passover feast and while he was there he taught and did miracles, check out this passage from John 2

***<sup>23</sup> Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, many people saw the signs he was performing and believed in his name.<sup>[d]</sup> <sup>24</sup> But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all people. <sup>25</sup> He did not need any testimony about mankind, for he knew what was in each person.*** ***-John 2***

So it also records that there was an air of dubiousness about the people's response, that Jesus didn't fully entrust himself to them because their belief was flimsy and based on superficialities

They believe in him just because of his SIGNS which is John's word for Jesus' miracles, his proofs

And Jesus doesn't trust this crowd because he knows that they're just attracted to him like America is attracted to Justin Bieber.

He's kind of innocuous when he's doing his normal thing, but we're fascinated when he's a freak show

Jesus doesn't trust that real belief is happening back in Jerusalem with this crowd

***[BACK TO ORIGINAL TEXT]:<sup>43</sup> After the two days he departed for Galilee. <sup>44</sup> (For Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his own hometown.) <sup>45</sup> So when he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, having seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the feast. For they too had gone to the feast.]***

So here, as Jesus goes back to his hometown, John in verse 44 notes as an aside that a prophet doesn't have any honor in his hometown

and that the crowd that welcomes him back to Galilee was the same crowd that Jesus didn't fully trust back at the festival in John 2.

So a certain air of skepticism lingers over this crowd of people and their welcome of Jesus to back home, even as they greet him warmly

***46 So he came again to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water wine. And at Capernaum there was an official whose son was ill. 47 When this man heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went to him and asked him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death.***

So Jesus goes back to Cana where he did his first big miracle, water to wine, we talked about that in John chapter 2 as well  
and there's an official who has a sick son, a really sick son—sick to the point of death, and the man is desperate

Any of you ever know a parent with a really, really sick kid? Any of you know someone who's got a terminally ill child?

Any of you ever seen a parent go to great lengths, fly all over the country, do whatever it takes to get their kid the possibility of even just a few more months of life?

Any of you walked through the heartache of a dying child or walked alongside someone who's going through this helpless, awful, excruciating experience?  
It's heart-breaking, isn't it?

This man is in that position, so he comes from Capernaum to Cana, which is about 17 miles, to ask Jesus for his help.

Now we know in other stories of Jesus that he loves kids and that he's compassionate and loving and all that stuff, so you'd think that this would be a request right in his wheelhouse!

Healing sick kids, that's Jesus forte, that's his speciality! I'm great at talking a lot, Jesus is great at saving dying kids, we've all got our gifts!

But watch what Jesus says:

**48 So Jesus said to him, “Unless you <sup>le</sup> see signs and wonders you will not believe.”**

And there's our word and our theme for this series, “Believe” (circle)

Now a critical thing to get here as we try to understand why Jesus responds the way that he does is to remember one really really important thing about Jesus  
and that is he was obviously a Southerner.

And one of his favorite words and pronouns to use when he talks is “y'all.” But when some over-educated white guy who ain't from around here tries to translate his “y'all” they don't know what to do with it

So they just translate it “you.”

But take this to the bank, the vast majority of the time when the New Testament uses the word “you” it’s the word “y’all” translated by someone who just doesn’t get it.

The New Testament is almost all written to communities of people or Jesus is addressing whole crowds of people

Slight tangent here: In our culture, and this is especially true of Chatham County culture as I’ve gotten to know this community over the past 18 months or so we value the independent individual

Our default pronoun is the individual: “you” singular or “me” or “I”

Apple brilliantly tapped into this with the iPod about twelve years ago and they’ve since put an “I” in front of everything and have made a killing tapping into our deep love of the empowered individual

We love ourselves in America. We love and are obsessed with the “I” the “self”

And so we assume that our obsession with ourselves should be played out in the Scriptures—that the “you” is always addressed to the singular individual.

But the default pronoun in the Scriptures is not you, the singular individual; the default pronoun is “y’all”—the community, the corporate experience together

Our culture’s default pronoun is “I” or “me”  
MY default pronoun is “I” or “me”

But Scripture’s default pronoun is “y’all”—you, together.

And until you and I learn to change our default pronoun, until you and I put the “I” or “me” in SECOND place and the “y’all” in first place we will never experience the fullness of the promises of life in Christ and we will never get life in Jesus’ kingdom right.

Now in this case, the “y’all” isn’t used in a positive sense but a negative one.

Jesus isn’t accusing THIS man of demanding a sign or wonder, he’s accusing this whole CROWD of needing signs and wonders unless Y’ALL see more signs and wonders, you get bored and give up and don’t believe

Which is to say that real faith, real belief isn’t really taking root in your hearts and lives—and that’s what Jesus is interested in!

How many of you either are teachers or trainers of some sort or know someone well who is a really GOOD teacher or trainer?

The goal of every teacher and trainer in the world is lasting change, right? Whether that's an elementary school teacher or a life-coach or a skinny fast-talking white guy preacher, we all want to see lasting life change

Jesus here is just like any teacher or trainer or health coach or fast talking skinny white guy who preaches on Sundays  
the goal of his teaching and his miracles isn't just a freak show or one-time experience

But an internal work of believing, of deep-knowing, of deep-trusting, that has specific outcomes in people's lives and changed patterns of behaviors.

And so Jesus calls out this whole crowd and says  
"unless y'all see signs and wonders and experience the freak-show, y'all won't believe! And that's a problem because my goal isn't just to put on a show but to do deep-rooted change in your life!"

But this man is desperate, so here's what he says:

*<sup>49</sup> The official said to him, "Sir, come down before my child dies."*

When your son is about to die, and you've got nothing to lose, and you're desperate, you play through whatever you have to play through, don't you?

He doesn't dispute with Jesus, doesn't defend the crowd, he doesn't argue that HE'S got faith even if these other losers around him don't

He just plays through—you know what, Jesus, maybe you're right. Maybe we ARE all addicted to you putting on a good show for us  
and maybe we WOULD just start ignoring you if we didn't the signs and wonders any more

I don't know about any of this. Just please, Jesus, come down before my child dies.

You know, it's funny how being desperate puts things in perspective, doesn't it? Maybe if this man's son is all healthy and well, he argues and disputes with Jesus

Maybe if he's got no sick kid at home this conversation turns into an argument about believing and what it takes to believe and how much I need to see in order to believe

But what we find is that there's some crystal clarity that happens when something is actually on the line, when it's not just a theoretical conversation but someone we love is dying.

There are a number of stories in the biographies of Jesus where he responds to someone in ways that to me sound harsh or abrasive

And every time the people in those stories play through and respond again with a request in faith, even desperate faith like this, Jesus rewards it and celebrates it.

But this isn't exactly what the man requested, watch this:

<sup>50</sup> *Jesus said to him, "Go; your son will live."*

Now what was this man's request? "Come down before my child dies!" [CIRCLE AND CONNECT HERE]

This is a reasonable picture or agenda for how this healing would happen—I know you can heal and bring good out of this situation, or at least I think you might be able to

and it needs to look like this, I'm picturing it should look like you coming and doing something mysterious to make this healing happen

"Come down, Jesus, come down and heal my sick son!"

And Jesus replies "GO! Your son will live."

"I'm not going to go with you, you have to turn around, start the 17-mile journey back home

and TRUST and BELIEVE that I have healed him without me being with you as collateral or as a back-up in case it didn't take"

You wanted me to come with you, I'm telling you to GO and that your son will live

And I'm telling you that in the midst of this crowd full of people who's hearts I am calling out for being shallow and only interested in signs and wonders

Here it is Mr. Official, I'm testing you—is your faith going to run deeper than this crowd's faith or are you going to be just like the rest of these people?

"Go; your son will live" will you believe this??

So here it is: the tension between come down before my child dies and GO; your son will live

but you have to take that first step, not knowing what the outcome is or what's waiting for you back home

and I'm not going to be 100% back-up to make sure the job got done right

I'm telling you: the job will be done right, I'm on it, I've taken care of it, will you take the step of faith and GO?

Let me ask you: if you were this dad, what would you do? You've heard stories about this Jesus guy, maybe he's your last hope, maybe you even saw him heal someone else

And you're talking to him, right there, you've got him in arms reach and you feel sure if he would just come with you to see your son that your son would live

And he's telling you, "I'm NOT coming with you, you just have to go." What would you do?

If it was my son near death back home, and I had Jesus right in front of me, I'd go at him one more time—you sure you can't just come?

I mean, I kind of trust you and believe you could do it from here, but if you'd just come with me I'd really really know it.

And what this man does kicks me in the butt every single time I read it  
it is so beautiful, so simple, so bold and so inspiring that it brings me to tears and makes me pray and ask that I might be just like him some day

***The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way. [circle believed]***

The man ***believed*** the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way.

The man ***believed*** the word that Jesus spoke to him and ***went on his way.***

And when this man takes his first physical steps *away* from Jesus, he takes his first real steps *toward* Jesus in the deep places of his heart

As he moves physically distant and away from Jesus, he is growing ever nearer to Jesus in the depths of his soul

That first step of "going on his way" are one small step for this man and one giant leap for faith, hope, and love to begin to completely re-write his whole life

The official has approached Jesus and asked and re-asked Jesus to do something.

Jesus has given him a promise that did not exactly look like what he thought it would

And the official trusts that promise though it does not look like what he thought it would or should look like

And even though it means leaving the presence of Jesus who has the power to heal his son

He trusts by obeying Jesus, and that changes everything.

When I was a kid growing up in the church we had an old hymn we sang called “trust and obey”—and it said that there was no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey

And that’s true but the problem with it is that it separated out trusting and obeying, as if they were two different things

But my friends, the real only way to be happy in life and happy in Jesus, is to trust BY obeying

If we say that we trust him cognitively or theoretically or in our hearts or minds or whatever

But we do not do what he says, then we don’t really have trust or obedience. We’re doing neither.

There are unfortunately many in our world who would call themselves Christians who do not do what he says.

And the Scriptures are very strong to say that a verbal affirmation of who Jesus is without a life that is trusting by obeying is no Christianity at all.

Obedience is the opportunity to take trusting out of the showroom and drive it in real-time in our lives

So many of us talk about the challenge of believing in our heads what’s true but struggling to trust it in our hearts

Ever feel that? Ever think that? Ever feel like “I know what the right answer is but I’m struggling to really feel it at the heart level? To trust what I think to be true from the Scriptures?”

The invitation to obedience is the invitation to integrate your head and your heart. Obedience is physical therapy for believing; bringing together mind, heart, will, body and making you whole by making you holy

We trust by obeying; the full integration of head, heart, will, and actions that brings the life of the believer together.

If you’re on a spiritual journey of checking out faith and you’re moving beyond casual interest to real seeking, really pursuing what is true and wanting to know what is true

The best possible thing that you could do is start to obey the commands of Jesus and watch what he'll do:

start to pray, start to honor him with your words and how you do or don't talk about people, start to read the Scriptures, take some steps at serving and loving your enemies.

In the story we're reading, the whole story turns on this dance between

1. the man's request
2. the promise given by Jesus and
2. the man's obedient action, taking him at his word, believing him, and acting in faith on that promise

If you're here looking for YOUR story to change in any way, I want to encourage you to step into this same dance: 1. What's your request? What do you want or need God to do in your life?

2. Find a promise in Scripture that resonates with your request and 3. make some decision to live according to it, and see what happens.

It's changed hundreds of millions of lives, including this official and his son, and it'll change yours, too.

Now, it's one thing for the official to act in faith it's quite another to actually have the promise realized; there's all kinds of people in the world making all kinds of promises, will Jesus deliver on this one? Can he deliver?

A week and a half ago last Tuesday, there was a big forecast of a big snow that was going to start falling around early afternoon and get really bad by early evening.

And in Tuesday's paper they said you should probably plan on being home and off the roads by 6:00 to be on the safe side.

So when Kelly and the kids were in the Chapel Hill library at 1:00 last Wednesday and they saw snow starting to fall, they didn't panic.

They were going to finish up their library run and make their way home, maybe a little more slowly, but they were going to be fine.

Then they got on the roads. And this was what it was like. [PIC]

And what's normally about a 15 minute car trip took 4 and a half hours as they inched down 15-501 past St. Thomas More through the light at Manning Drive where the Dean Dome is

Moral of the story: don't take weather forecasters at their word! Let's see, however, what happens when this man takes Jesus at his word.

<sup>51</sup> *As he was going down, his servant met him and told him that his son was recovering.*  
<sup>52</sup> *So he asked them the hour when he began to get better, and they said to him, “Yesterday at the seventh hour [that’s 1:00] the fever left him.”*

<sup>53</sup> *The father knew that was the hour when Jesus had said to him, “Your son will live.” And he himself believed [circle: there’s our word again], and all his household [circle: and all his household].*

<sup>54</sup> *This was now the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee.*

Jesus delivers on his promises. Jesus delivers on his promises. Jesus. Delivers. On. His. Promises.

The official took a step of faith to trust that Jesus would deliver on his promise, but is it the man’s faith or Jesus’ power that does all the real work?

The step of faith matters, but the real work is done by Jesus

And notice what happens as the official takes that step of faith

He had believed previously, he had believed the word given to him by Jesus and he trusted by obeying: Jesus said “Go” and he went

And what we see is that belief begets belief—he took one big step of faith to GO when Jesus said to go, he meets the miracle of Jesus as he takes that step, and what happens to him?

He BELIEVES AGAIN! Even more! Him and his entire house as he tells his whole house the story of his interaction with Jesus and the timing of the healing of his son!

Belief begets belief; as we trust by obeying, as we lean into the promises of God, we find him to be faithful! we find that he delivers! we find that he’s good and trustworthy!

And that creates this virtuous cycle of believing leading to more believing leading to more believing.

When we discover that God is trustworthy, that Jesus is faithful to deliver on his promises, it feeds on itself in really powerful and positive ways

Wow, Jesus, you came through! You came through on that job, in that relationship, in that situation—celebrate and worship and give you thanks!

And I want to challenge you that the next question is a bit of a scary but super-important one: what else can I trust you with?

Are there other promises that I can step into?

Are there other areas of my life that I'm not trusting you with and you WANT to do something there that might just blow me away but I'm not yet willing to take that first step?

Are there areas of my life that I'm not even aware of where you want to move and do something but I'm holding onto it too tightly and maybe not even aware of it?

And here's the hard part, the prayer needs to be something like this:

"Jesus, before you even show me what that is, before you even reveal to me what you're calling me to do, here's what I say: the answer is I will trust you by obeying you."

Before you even make known what it is you want to do, I tell you without holding anything back that I'm all-in, 100% all-in on you and your way

and whatever you want me to do or not do, however you want me to live, whatever step of faith you want me to take

no matter what it costs me or how hard it feels or what I have to leave behind, I'm in.

See, as we take small steps of obedience and faith, belief begets belief, it's a virtuous cycle as we discover Jesus is faithful and he comes through over and over again

Even and especially in spite of the fact that it doesn't look exactly like how we would have scripted it.

Belief begets belief, but hear this and you know this is true: cynicism begets cynicism, doesn't it?

You can cynic your way into dis-believing in anything. It's not that hard.

Just start by doubting the love of the people who are closest to you—that's not that hard, really.

Just tell yourself that no one really loves you, they're all just in it for themselves

From there, you start doubting everyone else around you

and that eventually leads to doubting every kind of authority

Before you know it, you think the moon walk was a big sham and you've joined the flat-earth society

All because cynicism begets more cynicism-hardening your heart to love and relationships in one area easily feeds more and more hardening in other areas of our lives

And when it comes to life with Christ, it's really, really easy to be a cynic. It is!

And here's the reality: once you start down that path, it's almost impossible to meet God.

We will meet people in the book of John who are so dug-in against believing in Jesus that they will literally see a dead man raised back to life, and they will refuse to believe in him.

Once you've decided that cynicism is your default posture toward God, he could literally raise someone back from the dead and you would find a way to cynic your way out of believing that God did it.

If I didn't believe in germs and demanded that I see them before I could believe. There's only one proper tool to use to see them and that's a microscope, right?

But what if I demand that you show me that germs exist but insist that you use a telescope not a microscope?

What if I insist that I cannot trust the microscope, won't use the microscope, refuse to look through the microscope? Will I ever, ever, ever see germs? Nope.

Does that mean that they don't exist? Nope, it just means that I refused to use the one tool that was available for me to see what was really there and true.

Looking for God through the lens of cynicism is like looking for germs through the lens of a telescope. It just won't work.

And you don't prove anything at all by it, all you've proven is what all of us who believe already know:

that you can't see that God exists through the lens of cynicism any more than you can see that germs exist through the lens of a telescope

Cynicism begets cynicism and belief begets belief.

I want to invite those of you who are prone toward cynicism to do yourself a favor: become cynical about your cynicism.

Do this for me: play out your cynicism to its logical consequence: if you literally became cynical about every single thing, you'd be cynical about your own cynicism and the whole thing implodes on itself.

Cynicism is a poor instrument for discerning what is true and real. It can only doubt endlessly and poke holes and exist as a defensive, pitiful, lazy posture.

Cynicism isolates us and keeps us hiding in shadows and living half-real lives eaten up and corroded by the acidity of cynicism

It cannot build up anything that is lasting or good.

The alternative that the Scriptures call us to is to believe, which is not stupidity, gullibility, naivete or sappy sentimentality or just wishful thinking

Believing is the result of the four things we've been talking about: 1. Reliable witnesses, 2. Personal experiences, 3. It makes sense of the world around us and 4. It's a gift from God that we are invited to ask for.

None of this is empty-headed, sentimental, wishful thinking. It's thoughtful, it's thorough, it's wise, it's discerning  
and it's the only, only, only way to get to the WIDE-AWAKE REAL

In this story, Jesus makes a promise, the official trusts that promise, acts in faith on that promise, and discovers that Jesus is 100% trustworthy.

There is a drama and a dance here of promise, faith-filled trusting by obeying, joy, and ever-increasing faith.

This morning as we move into a time of communion, we have a chance to do that same dance with Jesus.

Throughout the first few chapters of John, Jesus has already made outrageous promises—stuff like whoever believes in him will not ever die but have everlasting life.

First off, who says that? Secondly, how do we know he has the authority or power to deliver on this promise?

Earlier we talked about how I could promise you that if you went straight after church to McDonald's after the service that you can get free McNuggets if you breakdance for the cashier  
but I have no authority or power to deliver on that promise

UNLESS, I go in ahead of time, give the manager and cashiers my credit card, and I say, "I'm paying for anyone who will come in and breakdance for you so that they can get chicken nuggets."

By my credit card, I buy the authority to pay off your debt and get you your chicken nuggets  
There's a very, very small condition: all you have to do is breakdance for the cashier.

But does you breakdancing, does that actually pay the cost for the Nuggets? I'm paying, all you have to do is dance.

Jesus makes incredible promises of forgiveness, reconciliation with God, eternal life forever, and a fuller, richer life in the here and now

The way that we know that Jesus has the authority to deliver on ALL of the promises that he makes is that he dies on the cross to pay for our sins

And then three days later he is raised back to eternal life

He pays our debts, he goes ahead of us and pays for us, puts his body and his blood on top of all our debts and absorbs it, takes our debt upon himself

And THEN he himself experiences and does what he promises that he has the authority and power to give us:

he is raised again to eternal life, perfected life, to never die again.

Jesus calls us to take a step of faith, to trust and obey him, and that in doing so we will have everlasting and perfect life

He calls us to share in his life, to walk in his way, to have his story to be our story

Jesus dies to pay off our debt, to absorb the wrath of God against sin that will one day be done away with once and for all, he goes ahead and pays for all of it

And all we do is believe, all we do is a small faltering step of faith, and we get the whole reward bought for us with the precious blood of Jesus

One small act of faith, one small step toward trusting in Christ, and from that small, ongoing, as best we can steps of faith each day, and eternal and everlasting joy is promised us

All starting right now.

Jesus payment with his body and his blood is what we celebrate today with communion.

On the night he was betrayed, Jesus gathered his twelve rather ordinary guys together to celebrate the Jewish Passover feast

And he took his ordinary guys and he took some ordinary bread and he said “This is my body, broken for you, eat this in remembrance of me.”

Then he took an ordinary cup, and he said “this is my blood, drink this in remembrance of me.”

And the guys ate and drank and they had no idea what it all meant—and then the night unfolded like their worst nightmare

And they spent a couple days in a fog of pain and confusion and shame and fear

And then...then Jesus was raised back to life.

And slowly they began to understand what it all meant

And slowly, over time, they began to believe. This morning, with Christians all over the world and over the past 2,000 years, we take this bread and this cup as a step of faith

Declaring that in spite of our fears or doubts or questions, we believe.

If you've declared to a body of believers somewhere that you believe in Jesus, just like the official we looked at this morning believed, then you are welcome to Jesus' table.

If you have not yet made that first step of faith, then this meal isn't for you yet. But it could be.

We invite you to consider Jesus: his promises, and his life, death and resurrection that has sealed those promises to us

And we invite you to trust him today. And if you're ready to do that, there will be prayer ministers in the back ready and glad to pray with you.

If you're in a place where you HAVE trusted Jesus before but you're just in a stuck place, struggling to believe, wanting to believe or wanting to want to believe, but you need some help fighting for it, those folks are there for you as well.

3 tables in the back, the bread is gluten free; take at the tables and leave your cup there

Pray