

What Do You Believe

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[0 : 00] Lord, open our hearts to thy word and thy word to our hearts. Amen. Peace, peace. I suffer from being a little bit shy.

And when I get in conversation with people, the weather is always a substantial subject of interest. And whether or not you can see the mountains and how the hockey team's doing and in season how the football team's doing, those are all possibilities.

And whether I like Vancouver or whether I don't like Vancouver and how long I've lived here and how long I've, where my people have come from and where your people have come from and all these things are great subjects of conversation.

But then on Christmas Eve, probably it's important to say something important. And that's not always easy to do. Because I don't know where you're coming from and you don't know where I'm coming from.

And if you lived in the earthquake-destroyed village in Italy, I wonder what you'd have to say. And if you were on a hunger strike in a jail in Ireland, I wonder what you'd have to say.

[1 : 22] And if you were a hostage in Iran, I wonder what you'd have to say. And if you were sitting quietly in church and were 69 years old and had just been elected to be the president of the greatest nation on earth, I wonder what you'd say to yourself and to your God when you knelt down on Christmas Eve.

And if you happen to go to University of British Columbia to prolong to a fraternity and to be making out all right socially, and the future looks exciting to you, I wonder what you'd have to say about what life means.

And if you were facing a terminal illness and time was closing in on you, I wonder what you'd have to say. We all know people in these kinds of situations, and they're only a variation in degree from the situation that you're in right now.

And I would like simply to ask you a question. What do you believe? Now what you're encouraged to believe is what was read to us in the epistle for tonight, which says, God at sundry times and in diverse manners spake unto the fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he's spoken unto us by his son whom he has appointed the heir of all things, by whom also, and incidentally, he made the worlds.

That God has spoken to us. And I find for my shy and retiring nature that it's very difficult to bring this before people in any way that's meaningful to them, because, well, how do you say it?

[3 : 07] Because either it's the most stupendous, earth-shaking news that there is, or else it's just another ho-hum. And if that's what you get kicks out of, all right.

And of course the difficulty is that a lot of people really believe that you should not believe in religion. And other people sidestep the question, as I see it, by saying that they believe that religion is irrelevant.

And other people take courses in comparative religion so that they can rise above it all. Very dangerous thing to do. And if you were to take such a course, you might make this discovery, which one writer has set down for us, that Christians believe that God is most truly God when he is dying on a cross for our salvation.

God is most truly God when he is dying on a cross for our salvation. The Muslim prays to an inscrutable ruler, the compassionate, the merciful, who has revealed his will in the Koran, but has not revealed himself.

The Hindu can hardly be said to pray. He realizes in contemplation his own unity with that undifferentiated one, his separateness from which is pure illusion.

[4 : 39] I could read it over again afterwards if you want to listen to it again. The Buddhist does not use the word God at all, though he may have an acute awareness of that beyond, which in some sense we may call God.

And so those in the world who do profess to be religious are not, as somebody supposes, playing variations on the same theme, but are at a very basic level completely contradictory to one another. And so the question, what do you believe, on this Christmas Eve, 1980, becomes very important. And the thing that I can't get through my head and the thing that I don't know how to face with people is the fact that most people recognize that as Hebrew says, God has spoken to us in Jesus Christ, and he is the truth on which Christianity is based.

But charity to my fellow man in a pluralistic society demands that I don't say so. And that's the contradiction we all face.

And so we're trying to find desperately some truth which comes from inside of ourselves, something which can be extracted from the deep wells of our own consciousness and can be brought out so that people can say, Ah, yes, this is the truth, and it came from my gut, so I know it's the truth.

[6 : 24] And we've made many attempts to do that in this day and in this generation. But still there is about it something which is deeply unsatisfying and something which completely contradicts the statement that's here.

God has spoken in his Son, Jesus Christ. Whatever the world means and whatever truth is has got to come to terms with that fact.

And I was brought up against it because I want to ask you tonight what you believe. Not that I want you to give me an answer because it's got to be your answer within your own mind and heart anyway.

But there's got to be an answer. And I was reading a review of a book called The Distant Grief. And it was about a Christian community in Uganda just a few Christmases ago where Idi Amin had decided to wipe out this community and was methodically going about the business of meaning of putting them to death.

And he was being so methodical about it that they got to the point where they didn't have to say to people do you believe in Jesus Christ? Because it wasn't as simple as that.

[7 : 58] It was just are you prepared to die for Jesus Christ? And that sort of heightened the question considerably. And to our society and our world where we're worried about interest rates and inflation and the cost of gasoline as this article put it in our society where we're worried about the abundance of the possessions that we have and have opportunities for a good time way beyond any capacity we have physically, mentally, or emotionally it's important to ask the question what do you believe?

and it probably isn't extrapolating too much to say that from that question comes the question what are you prepared to die for?

Because ultimately that's what you have to do that's part of your life and mine and so what we believe most deeply is obviously the thing that ultimately we will die for or we will die in the knowledge of it and it may be a bitter and unhappy experience we don't know but that's the question that you've got to face and in a very real way on this Christmas I want to tell you again not to tell you something you don't know but to tell you something that all of you do know that God at sundry times and in diverse manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets but hath in these last days spoken unto us by his son what did he say?

God has spoken unto us in Jesus Christ and this service is to give you an opportunity to hear what God says and to work out in your own mind and heart what your response to it is and can I illustrate it to you very simply with this piece of bread because I wanted to do this somehow because it seems to me that sometimes what's at the heart of this service is lost because this is just a piece of bread and Christ took it into his hands and broke it and gave it to his disciples and said to them this is my body which is given for you they took it and ate it and in some way understood what he meant and then he went and he took perhaps a cup and he took a bottle that you could find on any shelf in any home and he poured out wine like that and then he said to them just like that and this is my blood which is shed for you drink this in remembrance of me and what he meant by that was that he believes in you very deeply as one who has been created in the image of God he believes that you are one who is the object of the love of God and he believes that it is God's purpose that you should one day stand before God and so he says here is my life and we in a very practical kind of way need to take that bread and that wine into our hands and say and here is my life when Jesus did it

for his disciples he said

I am prepared to die for you I have chosen to die for you and there is a very real sense in which when we take the bread and wine into our hands we are saying and I choose to die for you to give my life completely and utterly to you and that's what the Holy Communion is all about and I don't I don't think there's anything else that's that's really important and I just I know that for a lot of you coming out at this hour of night that it's a meaningful thing for you to do and I very much want you to come and to partake of this bread and this wine as it's given to you in this service and I want you very much to hear God speaking to you in Jesus Christ as it is represented in this bread and this wine and to hear Jesus Christ saying

[13 : 25] I am giving my life for you and to receive that as his gift and in so far as you can to echo in your own heart the response and I am giving my life for you because whatever life means in this year of grace 1900 and 18 whatever else life may mean whatever else life may involve there is the point and focus of what you believe and as Christians our faith is focused on the fact that God has spoken to us in Jesus Christ and we need to humbly and on our knees say I believe this becomes the means of God pouring into our hearts the peace and the grace and the love which he longs that we should have and which we long to have but maybe don't really know the source and the source is that God has spoken to us in these days in Jesus Christ .

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