

## Lent 4B - 2018

*Mr. McBeevee* is one of my favorite episodes of *The Andy Griffith Show*. (Modern viewers will have to suspend judgment about smoking, little boys alone in the woods, and talking to and accepting gifts from strangers.) Little Opie is playing in the woods, and he strikes up a friendship with a power company lineman working among the trees. Mr. McBeevee is a jovial sort, who makes smoke come out of his ears, jangles because of his tool belt, and climbs up and down to work on the lines. He entertains Opie with a few simple tricks, gives him a hatchet, and then climbs back up the pole.

When Opie's father asks where he got the hatchet, he tells the truth. "Mr. McBeevee gave it to me." He then proceeds to tell all about the man who walks in trees, jangles when he walks, and blows smoke out of his ears. Much discussion and melodrama ensue, in which the adults try to decide if Opie should be forced to tell the truth or be allowed to continue in his fantasy with his imaginary friend.

There is a solemn tear-jerking scene between Andy and Opie in which Opie cries, "Don't you believe me Pa?" and Andy looks at him and says, "Yes, I believe you son." Later, Barney complains, "You don't actually believe in this Mr. McBeevee, do you?" and Andy says, "No, no I don't. But I do believe in my son. I believe in Opie."

It's that second sort of relational, trusting, relying, belief that John is talking about here—a belief that doesn't yet have all the facts, that hasn't yet figured out all the theology, that hasn't yet worked out all the whys and wherefores, but yet has been able to trust in the promise of a God who has acted to save the world, the world that God created and loves.

Living in the rural South, I am occasionally asked, "Brother, are you saved?" When I say "yes," they usually want to know when. A few years ago, a friend told me what I think is the perfect answer to the "when" question: "2000 years ago on a garbage heap outside Jerusalem. But I only found out about it a few years back." We are God's beloved children, and we were saved long ago. We are invited this day to trust that salvation anew and live each day in the hope and security of that love. (By Delmer Chilton - *Living Lutheran - Lectionary blog: John 3:16, Opie and the world*)

In her 2013 book, *Christianity after Religion*, historian Diana Butler Bass points out that the English word "believe" comes from the German "belieben" — the German word for love. To believe is not to hold an opinion. To believe is to treasure. To hold something beloved. To give my heart over to it without reservation. To believe in something is to invest it with my love.

This is true in the ancient languages of the Bible as well. When the writers of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament wrote of faithfulness, they were not writing about an intellectual surrender to a factual truth. They were writing about fidelity, trust, and confidence. As they saw it, to believe in God was to place their full confidence in him. To throw their whole hearts, minds, and bodies into his hands.

The fact is, I can't think of any significant human relationships in which doctrine matters more than love and trust. So why should my relationship with God be any different? When I ask my husband, my children, or my friends to believe in me, I am *not* asking them to believe certain facts about me. I'm not saying: "Affirm without question that I'm 5'1, have curly black hair and brown skin, and live in California." Rather, I am saying, "Dare to hang on. Dare to believe that I won't let you go. Trust me with your heart. Trust me with your love, your faith, and your vulnerability. Allow yourself to treasure me as I have come to treasure you."

Conversely, when one of my human relationships falls apart, the breakdown is never merely intellectual. What breaks between me and the other person isn't *facts*; what breaks is vulnerability, intimacy, and fidelity. What breaks is the deep, abiding trust that makes love and safety possible. (By Debie Thomas - *JOURNEY WITH JESUS A WEEKLY WEBZINE FOR THE GLOBAL CHURCH, SINCE 2004*)