

My kids play a game called ‘stuck in the mud.’ One will lie on the couch and pretend to be stuck in the mud. As soon as I ‘pull them out of the mud,’ they get stuck again.

Many of us play this game with God. I believe that people get to a place where they are stuck, where they stop engaging with Jesus in a new way. Where there is no longer passion to follow Jesus, where we are comfortable with how we have come to understand God. We are no longer moving forward by faith. We are stuck, maybe even stuck doing some good things, but not living, not having our living reformed and transformed by our faith. Jesus confronts us putting new opportunities to minister right in front of us. Things happen that should force us to be talking with each other about how we respond as Christians. [Oil spill, poverty in our town and in other countries, drug use, a new neighbor.

We are called by God to go forward believing in Jesus Christ. Are we stuck waiting to believe? Are we stuck in our static belief? Or do we believe in a dynamic way where we are continually transformed by the renewing of our minds?

In John, Jesus’ brothers try to understand having a belief in Jesus that transforms all of life, a belief that will not let them sit in the comfort of understanding Jesus as just their brother. They say to Jesus if you are really God, go show people in another place these miracles so they may believe. If you matter, if you are the Messiah then you’d better let others know. There is no better time and place to do this than in Jerusalem at the festival of Booths. This was a festival where every Jewish male was to attend. His brothers wanted Jesus to do signs there because they did not believe. They wanted to be convinced that Jesus was the one to follow in this life encompassing way.

We are always saying prove to us Jesus, prove to us again that you are the Messiah, our savior, God come into the world to forgive our sins and bring life. Prove that you really are one to follow with all our life. Prove that you are one to follow in a way that doesn’t allow us to be the same as we are today.

At the festival people are looking to kill Jesus. He is threatening. If he is God, the barrenness of their religion will be revealed. If they believe, they can’t keep living life the same way. It is no wonder people are looking to kill Jesus. This reaction actually points to Jesus as the revelation of God to the world. A mark of God’s revelation to the world is rejection by the world. Believing in Jesus destroys what the world thinks about itself. It is the difference between believing in the god you have created vs. believing in the God who created you. Who is in control changes. Jesus changes everything.

Another and more insidious response to the threat Jesus poses is to complain. The crowd complains about Jesus. He is a good man. He is a deceiver. Both are wrong. These complaints minimize the real impact Jesus has on the world. They box Jesus in. Complaining gives people a way to deal with God breaking into the world while still being in control.

When we complain we have power. We define truth. (Mousetrap illustration.) We try to make our perceptions into reality. We don't really want to live differently than we do. So we complain about change. We don't want our thinking to change. So we complain about anyone with different thoughts. We don't really want to understand faith differently because our hypocrisy and apathy and selfishness will be revealed and we want that hidden. So we complain. Instead, we can be in wonder at what God is doing, because when we wonder, we give him power. Then we can be transformed and be agents of God's transformation in the world, not stuck in complaining inertia.

The good news is that Jesus can break through fear and complaining. Jesus can overcome inertia and our hypocrisy. We can join with Jesus in bringing God glory. Jesus taught and there was wonder. Jesus said you will know if my teaching is from God if you resolve to do the will of God. Jesus is not trying to build some kind of school of followers, but to glorify God. If we have committed belief, we don't wait for Jesus to do a sign. We follow seeking to glorify God. As we do that we will see if what Jesus says is true or not. We have to follow Jesus to recognize that Jesus is true.

(Example of doing something and finding out by doing if it was right or not. – Exploration of Wyldlife.)

We know that we resolve to do God's will if we seek God's glory, not our own. If we want to serve ourselves then the only worthwhile thing is doing what God wants. The seeming contradiction is that as we follow Jesus and no longer live for ourselves we are more ourselves. As we sacrifice personal fulfillment to bring glory to God, we gain fulfillment.

This happens because of Jesus. On the last day of the festival, Jesus metaphorically lifts the people out of the mud. On that day there was water drawn from the pool of Siloam and carried up to the temple of Jerusalem in procession with singing involving these scriptures. Zechariah 14:8, "On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem." And 13:1, "On that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity." Isaiah 12:3 "With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. And you will say in that day: Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known his deeds among the nations; proclaim that his name is exalted." Then the water was poured out dramatically as a sign of God's salvation.

Jesus speaks into this, declaring, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink.” Jesus offers the sign his brothers were looking for. Jesus is the source of salvation. Jesus has what we need. We need to drink. We don’t have what we need. Jesus can’t make us drink. God is at work calling us past our complaints and fears to go forward believing.

When the people heard Jesus say this some said, ‘He is the prophet.’ ‘This is the Messiah.’ Others raise more reasons not to believe. I wonder about the brothers, what did they say? Do they believe? People want to do things, follow or arrest Jesus, but no one did. People are stuck again in their same way of living.

Will we find yet another excuse to not believe? Will we define our belief so that our lifestyle is not interrupted? Choose to go forward following Jesus. Let God reveal his salvation and our purpose through Jesus the Christ in our lives, despite changes, despite our doubts, despite our need to be in charge.

May our church believe, living into the fulfillment of God’s promises. Let us choose to go forward with faith in Jesus not content to be stuck in the mud again.