

There are Two Kinds of People...

Okay Maybe Three

Romans 4:1-5

February 25, 2024

Control freaks over think everything, manage every moment. Each step taken in life is precisely plotted and thought out, before a foot leaves the ground. Control freaks live the illusion that they are in control of their own lives.

As I said, there are two kinds of people “control freaks,” and those who are “out of control.” In contrast to control freaks there are those people who live more by the seat of their pants, who refuse to plan ahead, they are spontaneous and **spring into spur of the moment decisions.** Let’s call these people “out of controllers,” people that like to take big risks, who seem to embrace the unknown and unpredictable.

Here’s the thing, control freaks and out of controllers are just two sides of the same coin. They both seek control of their lives but find it in different ways. Control freaks plan their lives to the “nth” degree and out of controllers plan to have no plan.

However, on March 15, 2020 COVID-19 reminded all of us how little control we actually have. That was the day that life changed suddenly and unpredictably and we realized how little control we really had. **The earth shifted underneath our feet** and our world was irreversibly changed. That was a devastating time for everyone and any imagined sense of control any of us had was unexpectedly ripped from our hands.

Again, I said that the world is divided into two kinds of people those who are “control freaks,” and those who are “out of control.” However I think Abraham proves that is this isn’t true, because instead of “control” Abraham opted for faith. So maybe there are more than two kinds of people.

Already an old man, Abraham was wandering in a land where he was a resident stranger, a nomad. It was during his wandering that Abraham listened to the words and promises of a God he barely knew and in an ever developing relationship, eventually “Abraham believed God.”

Did you notice that the passage doesn’t say “Abraham believed in God.” No, rather “Abraham believed God.”

You see, there was no lack of gods to “believe in” in Abraham’s world. Pagan culture devotedly believed in a pantheon of gods, deities who **dished out curses and blessings, gods that demanded blood,** and could be bought off with gold. However, in this plethora of divine options Abraham believed in Jehovah God enough to start out on an unknown long journey as directed by the divine voice.

If we were to go back and trace this relationship between God and Abraham from the beginning (which was in Genesis 12) we would see that it wasn’t until Genesis 15 that there was an actual discussion between God and Abraham. Until then, Abraham goes where he is told and does what he is instructed without any comment.

So, what was it that loosened Abraham’s tongue, what was the topic that finally God Abraham to speak up? It was the fact that God had yet to fulfill the promise that Abraham and his wife Sarah would have a child.

Abraham was mourning the fact that he still has no child, no heir for his legacy. When God consoles Abraham and once again promises him descendants as numerous as the stars, we read the first account of **Abraham’s personal reaction to this divine discussion:** “He believed God.” Abraham’s faith was born in the relationship that grew between himself and God. It was at this moment that Abraham’s life changed, he stop believing IN God and started to believe God.

Faith is not to “believe in God.” Faith is to “believe God.” Abraham believed God. He believed God had a purpose. When Abraham believed God, he surrendered control of his life over to God without reservation or hesitation. Abraham trusted and obeyed God, and stepped forward in faith.

When a person believes in something or someone they do so with an expected outcome in mind. That expected outcome is consistent with that person’s way of thinking. For example, we may believe in a mechanic to be honest, knowledgeable and efficient to fix our car. **We continue to believe in this mechanic as long** as we get our desired outcome of good, inexpensive, and timely service. But what happens if the mechanic gives us news we do not want to hear; for our car to be safe to operate we need a new transmission, **brakes and suspension work all of which will be expensive** and take a few weeks to get all the parts. We may not believe in that mechanic anymore because we are not told what we want to hear or believe to be true.

We live in a world where many Christians believe IN God, who believe IN Jesus, but their version of God and Jesus defers to their way of thinking instead of the other way around. I’m not sure if anyone one has **noticed a subtly change I have made in the way** I refer to those who “believe God, who believe Jesus.” I no longer use the term Christian and instead use the terms follower of Jesus and Jesus disciple.

We live in a culture of counterfeit Christianity, where some Christians stand under the banner of Christianity, yet twist and warp scripture and the teaching of Jesus to commit acts of injustice, bigotry, greed, intolerance, and much more. They **seek to tear down anyone not like them and build walls of division**. It is this brand of distorted Christianity that says God is on our side and if you don’t believe the same way we do, don’t agree with the way we think, the way we worship, love who we love, hate who we hate, live life the way we live it then you really don’t love God and are not a Christian.

No, I believe that Abraham shows us the way of surrender, yielding our lives over to God’s agenda. Jesus follower and disciple of Jesus seem to me, to be truer and more consistent with what it means to believe God and Jesus. There should be honor, respect, Namaste in the way we embrace life and the people we meet on the journey of life.

Abraham realized that it’s only when we finally relinquish control, finally have faith and trust, finally become a follower, a disciple, acknowledging that our life is in God’s hands, that the plan of God unfolds before us.

Jesus called his disciples to “follow me.” But Jesus didn’t tell them where they were going. This can be a problem for those of us who have control issues.

I read this story, and I thought it would be a nice way to end our time together today.

At first I saw God as my observer, my judge, keeping track of things I did wrong, so as to know whether I merited heaven or hell when I die. God was out there sort of like the president. I recognized his picture when I saw it, but I didn’t really know him.

But later on, when I recognized this Higher Power, life seemed like a bike ride, but it was a tandem bike, and I noticed that God was in the back helping me pedal.

I don’t know just when it was that God suggested we change places, but life has not been the same since-life with my higher Power, that is, God makes life exciting!

When God took the lead, it was all I could do to hang on! God knew delightful paths, up mountains and through rocky places-and at breakneck speeds. Even though it looked like madness, God said, “Keep pedaling!”

I was worried and I was anxious and asked, “Where are you taking me?” God laughed and didn’t answer, and I started to learn trust.

I forgot my boring life and entered into an adventure. When I'd say, "I'm scared." God would lean back and touch my hand.

God took me to people who had gifts that I needed, gifts of healing, acceptance, and joy. They gave me their gifts to take on my journey, our journey, God's and mine.

And we were off again. God said, "Give the gifts away!" So I did to the people we met, and I found that in giving I received.

At first I did not trust God with the handlebars of my life. **I thought God would wreck it!** But God knows bike secrets, like how to lean the bike to take sharp corners, dodge big rocks, and speed through scary places.

And I am learning to shut up and just pedal in the strangest places. I'm beginning to enjoy the view and the cool breeze on my face with my delightful constant Companion.

And when I'm sure I just can't go any further, God smiles and says, "keep pedaling."

Do we need to know where God is going before we are willing to relinquish the handlebars? Let's make this Lent more about saying to "I believe God" rather than "I believe in God."

Amen