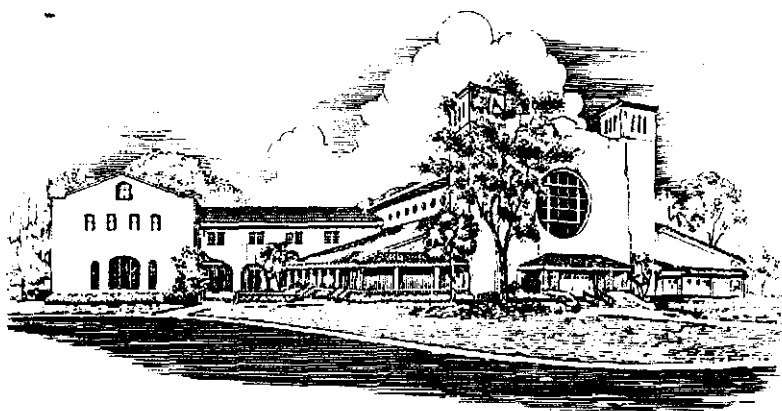


# First Church Pulpit

**"FOR THOSE WHO CAN'T BELIEVE ENOUGH..."**

**Text:** "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe!"  
— (John 20:29)



## FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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Years ago I sent a copy of a book of my sermons to a friend and, trusting him, I asked him to comment on the contents. That is very dangerous. I had an assistant minister once, who asked his wife after his first sermon. She thought about it. She said: "I thought he wanted me to tell him. I did. It is now fifteen years later, and he has never asked me again."

But anyway, Fred wrote back and said: "I most enjoyed the book, Richard. The only suggestion I could make is to ask if you could include the idea of the origin of the sermon. Where did it come from? Are there any special circumstances which prompted it? Did you have a particular person, or people, in mind?" Good thought. I have been conscious that the background setting of a sermon also can be helpful to the hearer or reader.

Sometimes I do not know myself where the idea originated. I gather material all the time. I do, however, happen to know about this. I say this especially to those of you who take the trouble to write on the little pew cards and send them along. You might think a pastor never looks at those cards, but we do.

It was about six months ago someone wrote on a card (She identified herself to me after the early service): "Can you preach a sermon for those who can't believe enough?" I do not know exactly what she meant, so I prepared the sermon by what I think she meant. What is

more, I have a far larger group than that one person in mind. Over the years, I have met many people who inkle that same kind of question to me. Let me tell you about a couple of them.

I often come across church members and friends who know everything. They are sure that all you have to do is to say: "I believe in Jesus", and everything falls into place after that. The problem is that is not true. When we teach too simple a Gospel to our children, we set them up for a failure of faith later on. If they go away and some professor challenges them to think anew; well, I have seen young people whose whole faith topples, because we, the Church, have not prepared them. The simple faith is not so simple.

I had one young stockbroker ask me: "You hardly expect me to believe all that, do you? I mean, all that about the Red Sea opening, and somebody coming back from the dead, and the world standing still, and an ax-head floating on the water.... What I would like to ask you, Dr. Cromie, is what should I believe? I just can't take it all."

Then, there is another group of grand and good people in the church, who come every Sunday. (As a little aside, I say to those of you who are in regular attendance: it means a lot to us who love worship, just to see you here; you add a lot to the service.) But, some know so little about the Bible and their faith. There is a church

officer in a former parish, who was quite ill. I said to him: "Let us pray together." We were in his hospital room. He replied: "I don't know any prayers." I said: "I do not mean prayers that you memorized, I was asking for us to pray together!" Then, this fully grown, successful businessman said:.... "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep.".... That is a lovely prayer, but somewhere about the second grade, he stopped growing in his faith. This sermon is in part for him.

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Now, I suppose before we travel much further, I should say a word about what "enough" is. I cannot say what is enough for you to believe; only you can say that. Some of you believe almost anything. It could be that you will be bothered by this sermon. You do not need anyone to help you, because you know what you believe. God bless you, you are lucky. He has been good to you.

Others have to search around. Why some question and challenge, I do not know. Perhaps they received a telescope and a microscope for their second birthday, and they are never secure after that, without investigating. They keep looking... and looking...and looking. So this sermon is for you, if you say, for whatever reason, as the disciple said to Jesus: "I believe, help me with my unbelief." If you do not believe enough, defined by you, not by me, this sermon is yours.

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Now, my text is one that is normally heard on Easter, or the Sunday after Easter. It has to do with Thomas, who was not there when Jesus was revealed. He said: "Unless I see it for myself, I am never going to believe it." You know people like that, who do not believe anything, unless it is verifiable, until it meets their scientific standards and measurements. Well, Jesus knew more than Thomas. He came back. When Thomas saw him (He did not touch him), he exclaimed: "I believe." Then Jesus said, and this is the question I want you to focus on: "Do you believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet believe."

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There are three little things I want to say to you.

1. The first is that it is all right to ask honest questions of your pastors, your friends, your parents, your children, and of the Lord God Himself. If truth is truth, wherever it is found, it is still truth, and you do not have to fear it. In all of my scientific journeys, I have never found anything that I cannot reconcile with the purposes of the Bible. It is all right to search. My Ph.D. thesis is on the importance of the evolutionary origin of mankind to the development of Christian theology.

The search is sanctified. The problem is that in our society, we have almost come to the point where we worship the search. We often hear: "The journey is more important than the destination." Or, "It isn't so much finding truth, but seeking after it, that matters." One of the undercurrents that live in our society, says: "You don't have to commit yourself to anything, as long as you are honest, and as long as you continue to search. Commitment is an option."

But, look how silly that sounds elsewhere. Suppose Coach Jimmy Johnson had said to the Miami Hurricanes yesterday afternoon: "Well, now, fellows, it is all right to be neutral in this game. You do not really have to get into it. It does not matter too much whether you care if we win or not. You know the Irish are nice Catholic boys from South Bend, Indiana." Can you imagine?! Or Bobby Bowden, up at Florida State, saying: "Now, these Gators, they are Floridians, too. We should be open to the possibility that they might want to win, too...."

Are you with me? There comes a time when you have to pick a side. It is true with your life, and work, and ideals. It is true in faith, too. The search is all right, the game is worth it, but the goal is to find it! Ask any prospector. I mean, suppose you are in love with someone, and you are searching to find a way to have them love you, too. Keep on searching,

baby. It is not worth a cent until you persuade the one you love to make a commitment.

I used to know a woman, whose father had abandoned the family when she was still an infant. That is sad, but it happens sometimes. As she began to grow older, she decided she had to find her father. Well, I counseled with her, and tried to help, but she was bound and determined to locate him. She spent half-a-fortune on the search; traipsed all over the country, paid people here and there and everywhere, to help her find her father.

Now, I never had to look for my father. He was always there when I needed him, so I do not know what it is like to have to try to find a father. I do not mean to criticize her here, but when her twenty-year journey was almost over, and she failed, I said: "Honey, you do not need to worry. There is a Heavenly Father looking for you. That is the Father you need. It would be grand if you could find your Dad, but we are all looking for the God who is also looking for us, the God and Father of us all." It is all right to seek, but Jesus says the purpose is to find...

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2. Secondly, if you are going to take the trouble to seek, I would recommend, as your pastor and friend, that you look in the right places. I see people

searching everywhere for something, restless and unhappy. They "find" a few items now and then, but it ends up they were not worth searching for in the first place. Most people would answer the question: "What are you looking for?", with: "Evidence." Lawyers need evidence in a court of law. But, I am here as your pastor to tell you that the search for finding Jesus is not a quest for evidence. There is much ivory-towered cerebral activity in theology. It is interesting to write books, I have read many. But I never knew anyone who found God through intellectual search, not a one.

There are classic "proofs" for the existence of God. Many of you read about them in school. As I do, you probably forgot them: anthropological, theological, as well as cosmological, eschatological.... They are stimulating to talk and think about, but they are like intellectual spinning wheels. I never knew anyone who found Christ by thinking, nor by arguing with themselves, nor by seeking proof.

The disciples saw Jesus. "Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet believe." What would you feel tonight, if in the middle of the night, Jesus came into your bedroom? I do not want to trifle with such a possibility, even if it has never happened to me. My guess is that you would probably go to a psychiatrist to find out what was wrong, not to a theologian. We are normally not privileged to see

Jesus. And what's more, not all who saw Him in the first Resurrection responded affirmatively. Some of them doubted.

One of the most incredible verses in all of the Scripture comes at the end of Matthew, where the eleven disciples are on the hill with the Resurrected Jesus. He is about to ascend to Heaven. Now, these were not enemies, or atheists, these were the eleven, his chosen ones... and do you know what Matthew says? "Some of them believed, some doubted." Evidence? Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet believe.

Peter Burger has a beautiful book, the title of which is "A Rumor of Angels". I heard a rumor of angels. Diogenes Allen calls them "Traces of God"; Wordsworth said: "Intimations of Immortality"; T. S. Eliot called them "Hints and Guesses". Mainly, it is a matter of deciding, not on the evidence, but on what God brings inside your heart and soul, and strength, and mind.

There is a wonderful story in the Bible, where Lazarus, the poor man, who in this life received only the crumbs dropped from the table, died. He went up to heaven, where he met a fine man in his rich linen. Abraham was the moderator of the meeting. He said to the man in fine linen: "You missed it, because you were worshiping you". To the poor man he said: "Enter the Kingdom of God. You were worshiping

Him!" The rich man in fine linen said: "See, I have five brothers. Please let me go back to earth to tell them, so that they can understand." Abraham said: "If they do not believe Moses, and the Prophets, and the Word of God, they would not believe if someone came back from the dead." End of point.

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3. Thirdly, and last, when you complete the search, you had better be prepared to identify what, or who you are looking for. The search for God is not a philosophical theory. Dr. Allen says it is like a little seed that God plants in our heart. Most of us get so impatient, we don't want to wait for it to grow. And yet, we have to nurture it; we have to have the patience to let God allow it to grow. We are impatient people. You are looking for a person, for a spiritual relationship with God.

When the "Death of God" theology was in vogue twenty years ago, they taught that there had been a God at one time who created the world, but He went away somehow, and is hiding somewhere. God does hide Himself sometimes, but He is available.

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I love that chapter in Blaise Pascal's "Pensees" about the "wager" we have to make. He told of the man, much like any of us, who attended and helped his church, but he could not quite

come to an inward belief. He then went to visit Pascal, a mathematical genius and a believer, asking for his help to believe. Pascal told him that he did not have proof either. Then he said: "It is like making a wager on this whole game of life." If you keep stirring around, and turning over every stone and digging down every lane, and find but a little fool's gold here and there, you will be disappointed. There comes a time when you have got to open up your heart, and let God plant a seed, and then wait for it to grow. In other words, to use the vernacular, you "bet" that God is going to be there, and committed to that, go on to enjoy Him.

Christ is looking for you. In Acts 17, St. Paul went in to those learned Greeks, with their statues to this and that god all over the town. If you have been to Athens, some of them are still there. On one, Paul found a funny little inscription: "To an Unknown God". Paul said to these learned Athenians: "What you worship as "unknown", I declare unto you, that the God who created the Earth has come to be with us in Jesus Christ." You might remember that he did not win the debate. But it was not a debate. He was witnessing to what he knew. He was not speculating. He was passing along a firsthand experience.

I pity poor old Agrippa, God bless him, a couple of chapters later. He was the King who came and listened when Paul was on trial. Paul lost

the trial, but Agrippa said in words that haunted him forever: "Paul, you almost persuade me to follow Jesus." Did you hear that? Almost! We almost won the game. I almost lost my life. I almost got the job. I almost got hit by a train. I wonder, when he was old and gray, if Agrippa ever thought back to the day when what he needed was right there before his eyes, and he walked right by it. Almost!

Well, it is time to close, let's bring it home with some words of Socrates. When he was about to take the hemlock, his life just about over, his friends asked: "How do you know what is going to happen next, Socrates?" He said: "I don't really know. I believe.... But what do I have to lose in that belief? If it is as I feel it is, then everything will be all right. If it is not, I have not lost anything, for nothing would have been there in the first place. It is worth the wager, for the stakes are so high."

I do not want to get intellectual with you...but in accepting Jesus Christ into your life, what have you got to lose? If it is as He promises (I cannot even get that "if" out of my mouth)... if it is as He promises, then you have glory and honor, and dominion, and power, world without end forevermore. If it is not (Cannot get that "if" out of my mouth either), if it isn't, what have you lost?

You have had a rumor of His love, the power of His peace, the company of

His saints. Do not leave here this morning, or, if you are on the radio, do not turn off the broadcast; or if you are reading this, do not put it down until you say: "Lord, once more, here I am. Take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee. For now and forevermore. Amen."