

The Royal Poinciana Chapel

Sermon By

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Sixty Coconut Row, Palm Beach, Florida 33480

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"SOMEONE TO BELIEVE IN YOU..."

Text: "He who loves God should love his brother also."

- 1 John 4:20

We all need something to believe in. The here and now, the touchable, tangible items that we depend on to get through the daily grind are not enough. The things we give our lives to get are usually not worth it in the end. They will fail us, unless and until they become anchored to the depth of all we are and all we long to be in the Time and Providence of God.

That is what Jesus meant when He said, "Man cannot live by bread alone." Neither can a woman, neither can anybody. The food and drink we need to keep the body going help to keep the body strong and fruitful, but they cannot feed the soul and psyche which lie in the depth of all that is beyond.

Of course, we cannot live without the oxygen which keeps our lungs expanding and heartbeat pumping, but oxygen can do nothing whatsoever to help along the hopes and dreams and plans which bring our goals alive. We all need something to believe in. We were made that way from the beginning.

When the Lord God first formed us from the dust of the earth and then breathed His breath into us, He breathed His Spirit, too. Genesis adds that Adam (and Eve) became "a living being;" i.e., they became more than animals. They began to breathe like God, to think like God, to walk after God, to talk to God, to be in God's image. (That's what the Greek name for *Homo sapiens* really means: "Walking with his face towards the heavens;" i.e., not looking down to the dust of the ground.) With the breath of God in us, we are supposed to rise above the earth. The only problem was that shortly they forgot. They refused to listen to the Lord God. They came to believe that their own way was the right way. They began to doubt that God really meant what He said, or whether He had said it at all.

I guess if there were some short-cut way to capsule down what is wrong on the ground floor of the modern world around us (I would guess that most of us would agree that something seems to be wrong. It all seems upside down.), the answer might begin right here. For the most part, people have not found that "something" to believe in or, having once found it, they allowed the debris of the years to cover it up and over. They have not held on to it. We need to find it soon, or it will all come tumbling down.

These opening words sound cosmic and ethereal and otherworldly. Surely, some of you are thinking: they are too philosophical and literary to be useful to me on my daily rounds. But I mean it to be taken literally, by each of us. My question today is personally for you: to ask whether you have what you believe in, whether it is securely in place, whether you could roll it out in one grand extemporaneous monologue, during which you would stand up and testify to the truth and the whole truth that you believe in.

It's a funny world we live in, "funny peculiar," not "funny ha-ha," as we used to say back home. Just as I was putting the finishing touches on this sermon, I received an interesting e-mail message from former Congressman and Chapel member, Tom Lewis. It is a statement that was read over the public address system at the football game at Roane County High School, in Kingston, Tennessee, by school principal Jody McLoud, on September 1, 2000. I have condensed it for the sake of time. She said:

"It has always been the custom at Roane County High School football games to say a prayer and play the National Anthem to honor God and country. Due to a decision by the Supreme Court, I am told that saying a prayer is a violation of Federal Case Law. As I

understand the law at this time, I can use this public facility to condone sexual promiscuity by dispensing birth control and calling it safe sex. If someone is offended, that's okay. I can use literature, videos and presentation in the classroom that depict people with strong, traditional, Christian convictions as simple-minded and ignorant and call it enlightenment. However, if anyone uses this facility to honor God and ask Him to bless this event with safety and good sportsmanship, Federal Case Law is violated. This appears to be inconsistent at best and, at worst, diabolical. Apparently, we are to be tolerant of everything and anyone except God and His Commandments.

"Nevertheless, as a school principal, I ask staff and students to abide by rules with which they do not necessarily agree. For me to do otherwise would be inconsistent at best and, at worst, hypocritical. However (she said to the assembled crowd), if you feel inspired to honor, praise and thank God, and ask Him in the name of Jesus to bless this event, please feel free to do so. As far as I know, that's not against the law - yet." (End of speech; the e-mail continues...)

"Then, one by one, the people in the stands bowed their heads, held hands with one another, and began to pray. They prayed in the stands. They prayed in the team huddles. They prayed at the concession stand. And they prayed in the announcer's box. The only place they didn't pray was in the Courts. Somehow, Kingston, Tennessee, remembered what so many have forgotten ... We are given freedom of religion, not freedom from religion."

God Bless America. I believe in America and in the principles of freedom and liberty, which men and women have died defending."

I was amused, then angered, when I read in a recent New York Times Service release, compiled by Michael Wines, which told of the response in Russia to our current Election Crisis in America this past week. It read: "Nothing warms a non-American heart more than seeing the Sole Remaining Superpower, that swaggering, self-absorbed font of bad food and worse taste, get its comeuppance. What? George Washington's political heirs accuse each other of attempted election heist? Oh, so sweet."

President Vladimir Putin suggested dryly that Russia's chief election commissioner (who was at that moment in Chicago) might advise Washington on how to count ballots. (In *Chicago*, of all places.) "No matter how this saga ends," wrote the daily newspaper *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, "The so-called American democracy is giving other democracies, not as mature, some U.S. precedents to cite."

And, worst of all: "American democracy is childish," Leonid Radzikhovsky wrote. "Liberty or death - this is the motto of some American states. Everyone there has faith in this demagoguery, the way everyone believes in God, the American dream, and equal opportunities. We (i.e. Russians), the adults, know this for what it is: a trick. And they (not individually, but as a society) do not know that there can be no liberty, any more than there can be equal opportunities. They still have faith in those fairy tales thought up by their founding fathers 200 years ago, and live by them" (Miami Herald, 11/12/00).

Faith in fairy tales, indeed! But the difference, the first grand difference, is that if the vote had split 50%-50% in the old, now failed Soviet Union (where there were no elections) or in Russia today, it would likely result in a civil war. Here, in the USA, we do a re-count, by machine or by hand, frustrating to be sure, but we believe in the legal process as the proper means to settle our differences.

I believe in a lot of things. I believe in my family, my wife and our children. I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. I believe in love. I believe in this Chapel. And, of course, (to relate to the above) I believe in the American political system and the free election of our leaders, from local Town Council to the highest executive offices in the land, including the President. I am one who continues to believe in the Electoral College method of deciding Presidential voting, as part of our original commitment to States' rights. I don't believe that we should abandon it, no matter who wins the election. I believe in the system.

That system, however, was challenged severely this past week. I think we have all heard enough commentary on the subject that you do not need to hear another long, controversial opinion from The Chapel pulpit this morning.

I also believe in the right of every American not only to hold an opinion on political topics, but in the right to express that opinion, and to be as aggressive as necessary in argument, and in the courts, to fight for the rights we adore – in this case the right to challenge the particular ballot used here in Palm Beach County.

I was troubled, as you were, as the week progressed and harsh accusations were hurled around. But, in spite of the fact that no definitive decision has been reached, I expect that we will be led to an agreed completion of the election results before too long, and to an amelioration of the partisan disputes and the candidates, themselves. I also look forward to a more cooperative political and governmental process in the next four years. No matter which candidate wins, it is certainly true that no mandate for exclusive leadership has been issued by the American people.

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However, as timely as is the election crisis, my point was far broader...that we each and all need something to believe in.

Psychologists tell us there is a hierarchy of needs in the human makeup. In particular, Maslow wrote that. But many others also have discussed the hierarchy of human needs. They start out with the obvious needs of the body: food, warmth, safety, etc. They go on to the need to share, and the need to feel worthwhile, a little less obvious but equally important. Somewhere near the top of the list is the need to have something to believe in, something to attach yourself to. In the Christian Church, we teach that we all need not just *something* but *someone* to believe in: that someone being Jesus Christ, our Lord.

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And if you and I need someone to believe in, it is equally true that we need to have someone to believe in us. No man is an island, and no woman, either. However hard we try, however much we pretend, we all need someone to believe in us.

I remember the young man, long ago and far away, who dropped in to see me one day, say 12 or 15 years after he had left the area in the middle of a late teenage crisis, during which he had done a lot of self-defeating things that many others have done. He left quickly, in

shambles. It disappointed me, for I was working with him to try to sort things out. And I worried much about him and often prayed for him.

But a dozen years later, a young man came to my office, all fresh and clean in suit and tie, looking obviously successful. He asked if I had time to talk. I said, "Sure I do, sit down, Donnie. How have things been going since I last saw you?" He said, "Bad for a while; but then I began to get it all together. I got active in a church young people's group. I met a nice girl; I got a good job; I went back to school, and finished law school. Now, I'm doing great." (It still brings tears to my eyes.)

He went on to say, "I came to thank you." "Me?" "Yes. Ten thousand times, at least, I have thought about what you told me the last time I came to see you before I left." (Now, I need to confess that I did not remember exactly what I had said to him that day.) He rescued me by saying, "Dr. Cromie, you said, 'Donald, I believe in you! Learn to believe in yourself!' " I believe in you. Learn to believe in yourself. "Donald, I believe in you," he said, "and I didn't want to let you down."

I say the same to my children, especially when they are down. "I believe in you." Through the years, I have said it to a lot of people, young and not so young. Would you care to wonder why...?

Well, it will be obvious as soon as I say it ... I tell others that I believe in them because through all of my life, others have said it to me. When I was in special need, there were those who remembered to share the news that I was worthwhile and appreciated, and that nothing lasts forever and this, too, will pass away: my parents and family, my friends and fellow travelers, my teachers and ministers.

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You know... I also believe in you, here, listening today. I don't know all of you, but I believe in you, anyway. I believe that God has a purpose for your life. Everybody needs someone to believe in them. I believe in you.

But then, if you need someone to believe in you, so does everybody else. (Are you listening?) If you want and need others to believe in you, and thereby find the purpose I am speaking of, then begin by analyzing whether they *know* if you believe in them. If you do believe in the others in your life, do you tell them? I

don't want to embarrass anyone, gentlemen, but your wife could be dying to hear these words from you. You can make it everywhere else; you can be a great success, but it is grand to hear it from someone you love. Don't make them assume that you love them. "She knows I love her" is a sad refrain. You have time for everything else in the world. Some share happiness and charm everywhere they go. But, in turn, they forget to compliment the ones nearest to them. When you are searching, that's what you are really searching for: for someone to believe in you... Then, for heaven's sake... and for their sakes, too... start by believing in them!

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I heard a lovely story not long ago. Someone had sent a sermon I preached on "Friendship" to a man up in the Panhandle of Florida. He was a nice enough man, I am told, a good provider. He remembered to send a Christmas card and gift each year to his three children. But he never gave or shared himself (I was told). So my little sermon came. For some reason, they told me, he read it over and over again. I had said: "If there is someone you love, tell them; if you are proud of your children, tell them. Don't make them guess. If a friend or family member has helped you, write them a note or call." Simple enough preacher's fare ... You hear it all the time.

But, goodness, this time God touched the man's heart. (Only God can change a heart!) He sat down and wrote a long and lovely letter to his children and grandchildren, and copied it for each one. He sent the letters off, telling each how much they meant to him and how proud he was of them. He had never told them that before. One daughter called to tell me how much it meant to her and to all of them. "We will cherish that final letter forever." For you see, within a week or two after he wrote it, God called him home. He was gone. Maybe he knew it was coming; maybe he didn't... but he told his family that he loved them and that he believed in them! It meant the world to all of them.

I have been hearing from wives and husbands for nearly 40 years, in one way or another, how it is hard to believe in yourself when your spouse does not seem to believe in you. After 25 years, or 30 years, or 10 years..., one says, "I am not getting what I need out of this marriage..." Marriage is a two-way street. Each has to feed the other. You cannot give what you do not have. The sad part is that too often the other person begins to waiver in self-

confidence and self-esteem. The one you love can wear you down.

Children know it, too...because parents get into their own wee worlds, with all of their things that they have to do, and the fallout goes to the children. It is hard for children to build self-confidence when they feel they are not believed in at home. There is nothing a teacher can do to build up a child if the father beats him down. And, if a child ever feels that his parents don't think he is the greatest gift on earth, then the child usually does not believe in himself.

Others know it, of course. Parents know it, too. Employees know it. Friends know it. Teenagers know it. All of a sudden, you lose your self-confidence. It works both ways. Two Sundays ago a friend of mine saw me walking around before the service. Quick as a flash, he said, "You're losing weight!" Wowie! It didn't matter that I had lost only seven ounces. He made my day!

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What I am trying to say to you is: Whatever age you are, if you find the security within, born of the belief that God gave you the gift of life for a purpose, and placed you on earth when He wanted to, then as long as you and God are together, you should not get down on yourself. Once in a while, I saw it with my own mother. Things went badly in the last few years of her life. At times she felt that God was down on her. You know the feeling, don't you? If God is good, why does it hurt so much?

I never try to talk anyone out of it, because what I know about the Bible is that even when you are not up on God, Christ is up on you, chasing after you like the shepherd after the lost sheep. Wherever you are, He's there. I knew in the case of my Mom, and you know it in the case of yourself, I hope, and you know in the case of your loved ones about whom you worry, that it does not matter if they seem to give up on God, as God does not give up on them...not in Christ. "He who loves God should love his brother also."

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And, so that leads naturally to our conclusion: Christ believes in you. Think about the New Testament for a minute. Think about where all those ordinary people were before He met them. Okay? I mean, Peter was

pretending that he had it all. He was big and brassy. He could tower it over a lot of people, and he had a fast mouth. But, Peter knew something was missing.

Andrew, his little brother, was just the opposite. He was kind of quiet, and dependable. I like the Andrews of the world. They are the people who get things done. The Simon Peters of the world talk about it. We need talkers in the world, but we need doers more. Andrew did not know his life was worth anything, until the day he met Jesus Christ.

Christ was not only holding it out to *them*. He is holding it out to *you*. Because, wherever life has you now, you can count on this: You have one life to give. (How many others do you have?) He who loves God should love his brother, also.

But, isn't that what Jesus did for you...and you...and you...and me? He had one life and He gave it up for us. That is what I call believing in somebody else.

On this Veterans Day, we remember those who gave their lives for us and for all the others in their world. Some are gone. They believed in the future and they believed in you. The rest is up to you and me, for now and forever more, Amen.

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