W Thomas – 20th Sunday after Pentecost Sermon
St Thomas Episcopal Church Oriental NC – 10-11-2026
Transcript

This sermon ponders what it would have been like in Philippi if the Apostle Paul created a sign with the word believe and then added post-it notes that began with the word end. Ponder this for a second. Now, I've given you a hint a little bit as to what this might have been like in the front of your bulletin.

You see the post-it note graphic there? Pulling from Philippians. Now, I need to do a cultural reference, and hopefully this won't be too obtuse for some folks and others who actually have a subscription to Apple TV and have ever watched the TV show Ted Lasso. This is going to be one that sets right in, and if you haven't, it's okay.

I've brought graphic references to guide us, and they're all, believe it or not, spiritually based. And this will help us move more deeply into perhaps an imaginative understanding of Paul and his energy in dealing with the church in Philippi. Our bishop had done a nice bit of reflection, Bishop Sarah did, on the two of them, Euodia and Syntyche, and wondering if the two of them were not of one mind together.

Maybe they were having some discord, and Paul was trying to get them to hear one another's premises better. Anytime you've been in a body of people, especially a church, we all know that that can be one of the outcomes. So how can we get past some of that? What is Paul trying to get us to? What was happening in that TV show Ted Lasso? Ted Lasso is a character who shows up in England to coach a men's soccer team in the first year.

He's a former football coach. He doesn't have a clue as to what he's doing. And so when he's been there for a short while, he realizes he's going to put up a statement sign up on the wall to try to bring the team together.

And the statement sign is the word Believe. The word Believe. Now I have spent time with you before, those who have been to any of my regular moments with you as your supply priest, and I've talked about what the word Believe means from a church setting.

The word Believe in a church setting in particular has a great point of reference. And you think about those of you who are to be baptized, and I've used this also as a reference for those looking to one another when you're getting ready to marry somebody and you don't have a clue at what you're getting into. Edna

Marie and I will celebrate our 53rd wedding anniversary in just a couple of days. And I'm really glad that it continues to work well.

But the word Believe in a classic sense is understood as to set your heart on something. If you can set your heart on something, you don't have to have rational rules or rational data, it just seems appropriate.

And you try to work your way through it. You look at the way Jesus is speaking to the crowds, basically his solo voice to the Pharisees when he's telling the story of the wedding banquet, and it's sort of like you still don't understand when you're invited. That you don't have special privileges or you cannot be clueless, because I've been here long enough to talk with you and show you where the light is and the good news is.

You see, that made it harder for you to ponder your way through that crazy gospel. And now, with Ted Lasso's show, The Word Believe, being put up on the top of a wall, it bound the team together and the men started playing well together. Ted learned how to coach what we call soccer, which in England would be called football, or all of it over the rest of the world.

Now, more edification for you from a cultural reference. Ted Lasso had a second season, more of the sign, and it worked out fairly well. And then when that season ended and Ted went back to, I think, Kansas, it looked like the show was over.

And then somebody decided, no, we could get another year out of this if we make Ted the coach of a women's team that needed to start and had a woman coach on his staff, and then one of the great gifts came out of that. They decided to use the Believe sign again, but in order to give it better meaning, they put the Believe sign up a different color. But then the teaching was to say ***Believe and***.

Believe and. And so I was playing with that along the lines of the Apostle Paul taking the letter to the Philippians, and if it was to say, as it says on the front of your bulletin, ***Believe and*** rejoice in the Lord always. The Lord is near.

Believe and keep on doing the things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me. These are directly from the letter that we heard this morning to the Philippians. Believe and, whatever is true, honorable, pure, pleasing, commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Believe and. And then as we listen to how our bulletin unfolds, right on the front page, it says here, ***Believe and***, and then I'm going to add this, happy are

those who act with justice and always do what is right. You wrote that on the front of your bulletin, at least Katharine did.

Or your mission statement. ***Believe and*** we accept the call of Christ to grow spiritually, share our faith, and make known his redeeming love. So what is it to believe? What is it to look at somebody and set your heart on something? What is it to say, I believe? Scholars have researched Paul's writings, and if you know of Paul's story, as recorded in Acts, where he gets knocked off his horse on the way to persecute Christians, and he meets the risen Christ, and all of a sudden changes his ways and becomes this powerful exponent for us to try to understand what it means to have a moment where you enter in and follow and say, I believe.

The scholars think that Paul may have made some references with the word believe 60 times in all his letters. I would say that's a fairly strong case for the idea that in my imagination, I'm just imagining Paul running all around Philippi, putting little post-it notes up and saying ***believe and*** everywhere. And you know, sometimes that's a great way to get your message across.

In our minds, how do we do the same thing, both for ourselves and with others? It's how we enter into and live our lives. What is it for us? What is it to be good stewards of all that God has given us, and also be able to share with others what God has given us, and look to be leaders in caring for all that God has given us, which is God's creation. I was again reminded as I was driving in from New Bern , which is a beautiful spot, how absolutely gorgeous it is to drive through and above and around all the water and the marshes and everything and come into Oriental.

What is it to say I believe? What is it to live fully into the promises that come, that Paul speaks to, that Paul found? And let me see if I can find a way to stop talking, because there was one other thing that was in here that really struck me today. Yes, today's collet, again, it says this, if you use the idea of believe in.

Believe and. Lord, we pray for your grace may always proceed and follow us. ***Believe and*** that we may be continually given to good works.

I call you, therefore, this week to think about what is it to say the word believe, and then add the word and, and see what post-it notes you put up all around Oriental.

All these words I offer in the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.