

# Believe It or Not!

Acts 7: 55 – 60

Ps 31: 1-5, 15, 16

John 14: 1 – 14

**Purpose:** To explore the nature of belief so that those present can claim an identity in the community of Christ which orients them to the work of Christ.

Apparently the Ripley's Believe It or Not museums around the world have all kinds of amazing things. In Blackpool, Great Britain, you can visit the preserved remains of farmer Paul Stringer's double headed calf. Or ponder the mystery of the floating tap. They say it's one of the most popular exhibits on display. The floating tap has no visible plumbing and stands floating in mid-air with a steady flow of water flowing from the spout into a barrel below. If that doesn't satisfy you, just down the road at Ripley's Surfer's Paradise museum, you could wonder whether the display of real shrunken heads from the Jivaro tribe of Ecuador is really in good taste. But would you be willing to travel to Orlando, Missouri to touch the Fertility Statue?

After a decade of traveling around the world including to Surfers Paradise early last year, Ripley's claim to have confirmed over 2,500 new pregnancies. I'm quoting from their original Blackpool web site. "People have been coming to us every week telling us of their success. We have had all kinds of people trying their luck... One touch of this amazing figure and they have fallen pregnant within three months. Come and try it for yourself, one touch and you could be lucky!"

Well, would you? I reckon I'd be pretty safe! But, would you? Would you believe it or not?

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Believe it or not! That's the issue presented by today's gospel. "Believe in God! Believe also in me!" Jesus tells his disciples. I'm about to disappear for a while. But, don't worry. Stand firm in the things I've taught you and I'll be back to collect you after a while. "Believe in God! Believe also in me!"

And, the disciples aren't sure what to think. First there's Thomas. We're used to him being a bit suspicious. So we're not surprised by the interrogation that follows: "How do we know where you're going? How can we know the way?" Then there's Philip. He's got a log of claims! "Show us the Father," he demands. "Then we will be satisfied."

Believe it or not, it's not always easy to believe. Believe it or not, sometimes it is even harder to know what we should believe.

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The fourth grade of a certain school were given an essay for homework. The topic was "The Mystery of Life". One of the brightest students in the class researched the matter

diligently. She visited the local library. She googled it on the internet and had already written most of the essay when she thought that perhaps she would interview her family. “Mother,” she asked. “Where did I come from?”

“The stork brought you, dear!” her mother replied. A trifle bemused this bright young woman continued, “And where did you come from, Mother?”

“Why, the stork brought me to, dear!” the mother replied. A mite disgusted, but undaunted in her thirst for knowledge, she went to her grandmother. “Grandma,” she asked. “Where did you come from?” But, her grandmother said exactly the same thing. “The stork brought me dear.”

So the girl added a sentence to her essay. “In our family there hasn’t been a normal birth for three generations.”

Obviously she was a bright girl who could weigh the issues, but in our quest for truth – in our desire to know what to believe – we are not always so lucky. There are many voices that surround us. There are many voices that claim to know what’s best for us. Those voices tell us what we should think, how we should feel, and what we should believe. And those voices are not always reliable. They carry no guarantees. They are no more trustworthy than the voice that says, “Why, the stork brought you dear!”

Belief is difficult. Believe it or not? Sometimes it’s hard to know just what we should believe.

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And it’s not just because there are so many competing truth claims around us! It’s also because there are so few readily available measure that allows us to assess them. Belief is not as easy as taking the temperature on a hot summer day or setting the trip meter as you begin a long journey in a car. You can’t sip belief like a cup of tea or dip you toe in like you might at the swimming pool on a cool summer afternoon. You can’t dissect a bit of belief to test and see.

When it comes to belief, there are no half measures. Belief is an all or nothing affair. You can’t almost believe. I guess it’s a bit like doing the grocery shopping. You can’t taste the can of soup to test it. Once you’ve passed through the checkout you’re committed to the purchase. You can take it or leave it in the market place of belief systems, but you can’t try before you buy if you plan to believe.

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“Believe in God! Believe also in me!” Jesus invites in today’s gospel. And even though it’s not easy decision an awful lot hangs on our response to that invitation. The act of believing has powerful consequences.

Think for a moment of the placebo effect. The placebo is a pretender. It's the fake that's given in clinical trials to assess whether the effect of the real thing is authentic. However when some people believe that they are taking the real thing they report relief from their symptoms. The placebo may be a fake or an imitation, but the same can't be said of the power of belief in those who think that the placebo is real. Estimates vary, but according to the Better Health Channel, an internet site established by the Victorian Government, around one third of people taking placebos for complaints will experience relief from symptoms. Belief is a powerful thing. Even if it is just a placebo!

The belief that Jesus invites in the gospel is even more powerful. The belief to which Jesus invites Thomas and Philip and you and me to is one that makes us his allies in the unfolding of God's will and purpose in the world. When we believe we become partners in the divine mission. "Very truly," Jesus tells us, "the one who believes in me will do the works that I do and even greater works than these."

If we believe we become God's co-workers with Jesus. If we believe we are drawn into the creative impetus that renews all creation and draws it into the realm of God. If we believe we become immersed in the work that God would do. What God wants becomes what we want. What God works to achieve becomes what we work to achieve. And our energies become subsumed with the energy of God.

There's a lot at stake in our response to the invitation of the gospel: Believe in God!  
Believe also in me!

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There's an awful lot at stake too if you put your faith in Skydive the Beach, Australia's fourth largest skydiving agency.

"Tandem skydiving is the ideal way for a first time skydiver to experience the ultimate thrill of freefall," they say. No experience is necessary and almost anyone can do it! Attached to a professional tandem instructor all you have to do is smile at the camera, scream, wave, and take in the stunning views from 4000 metres above the beach.

But, isn't that the hard part? Once you're strapped in and the leap has been taken there's no turning back. You can't half do a sky dive. It's all or nothing. Just like belief!

But, it's the experience of a lifetime they reckon. To conquer the skies and push your own personal boundaries is a remarkable feeling. Just like belief!

It takes a leap of faith. No half measures. It's an all or nothing affair. But, it's the experience of a life time. Actually it's more than that! Faith or belief is the thing that shapes and forms your life. It's what determines where you belong and what your life's purpose will be.

Believe it or not? “I am the way, the truth and the life.” That’s what Jesus said. “Believe in God. Believe in me!” Strap on the harness! We leap together. Belief makes us partners, colleagues in God’s purpose: “I am in the Father,” Jesus says and you are in me.