

In our reading from Luke's Gospel – we find Jesus telling his disciples:

“You will be my witnesses.”

And then – in our first reading from the book of Acts –

and this is just after the crippled beggar has been healed –

– we find Peter addressing the crowd:

“We are witnesses.”

The task of those first Apostles was to pass on their new Christian belief to those who didn't yet have faith.

They were called to be witnesses – *evangelists*.

In just the same way – in our age – our calling is to share our faith in God –

witness to what we believe –

with our families – friends – neighbours and colleagues.

After all – if we don't pass on these beliefs – who will?



Before we go any further –

after all sharing our faith – our Christian belief – sounds a bit daunting –

let's think about what we actually *mean* by “belief”.

Because – actually – there are two kinds of belief.

The first of these is believing *that*.

We can believe that certain statement – or propositions – are true.

Here are a couple of examples.

We might believe that the musical *Mama Mia!* has been running in the West End for 25 years.

And we may or may not be right in our belief.

Or – in the field of science – we might believe that the dark energy is driving the accelerating expansion of the universe.

And, again, we may or may not be correct.

For some of us, our Christian faith is all about believing that ...

We believe ...

that there is a God –

that this God created the universe –

and that this God was present in the life, death and resurrection of the man – Jesus.



But for some people – there's more to faith than merely signing up to certain religious assertions.

There is a *second* kind of belief.

This is belief *in*.

Belief in is different.

Belief in is all about ...

loyalty –

trust –

commitment.

Again, we can easily think of examples.

In a General Election year – we might believe in the policies of a particular party.

And it might be a wise or foolish thing to do so – to trust them.

Or if I told you that I believe in the England cricket team –

then you'd know that I trust them to deliver success this summer.

And you could decide for yourself whether I was being wise or foolish.

For many people – Christian faith is not just about believing that – it's about believing *in*.

We believe in God ...

and so we place our trust in God –

we commit ourselves to following Jesus Christ –

we give ourselves to God's service.



You might say that the journey of Christian belief has three stages:

First – unbelief.

Then – belief that.

Finally – belief in.

We move from –

being sceptical –

to accepting the claims of Christianity –

to, finally, seeking to live our lives based on trust in God.



In this season of Easter – as we read the resurrection accounts in the Gospels – we see something resembling this pattern – especially in this morning's reading from Luke's Gospel.

Jesus' disciples start off unbelieving.

Some of their companions have just arrived –

full of news of how the risen Jesus has –

apparently met them on the road to Emmaus.

But they're unconvinced.

They're in a state of unbelief.

Until – suddenly – Jesus himself stands among them.

And not only does he stand among them – he also gives persuasive and convincing demonstrations of his resurrection.

Jesus helps these frightened friends move from unbelief to believing that – believing that their Lord is truly alive.

“Look at my hands and feet!” – he says ...

showing them his brutal wounds as proof that he really was the crucified one.

“Touch me and see.” ... he invites them ... “A ghost doesn't have flesh and bones!”

and he presents them his own flesh as confirmation that he was no mere disembodied spirit.

“Do you have anything to eat?” – he asks ...

and goes on to consume a piece of fish right there –

before their very eyes – as incontrovertible evidence that he was alive.

By now the disciples have reached that point of believing that ...

believing that Jesus – who died – really *is* alive.

It's time for them to move on to believing in – as Jesus calls them to trust – commitment and loyalty.

Now that they can confidently assert the facts of the faith –

they must demonstrate their belief in Jesus by going on to live it out.

“You are my witnesses – I am going to send you” ...

And as we discover in sequel to Luke's Gospel – the Acts of the Apostles –

this will involve trust and perseverance in the face of adversity.

A very real believing in.



Unbelief.

Belief that.

Belief in.

The pattern seems clear.

Except – *unfortunately* – for one awkward little comment tucked away in the middle of this story.

In verse 41 we read:

While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering ...

A better translation of the Greek puts it:

While they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement ...

A modern paraphrase puts like this:

They still couldn't believe what they were seeing. It was too much; it seemed too good to be true.



There – right in the middle of this path to faith – we suddenly find *disbelief*.

It was too much.

It seemed *too good to be true*.



We've probably all had those "too good to be true" moments – when we can hardly believe it.

When we suddenly realised that the person we love – loves us in return.

When we arrive at our holiday destination only to find it even better than the photos in the brochure.

When we open that much-longed-for gift and discover it's even better than we'd hoped.



This "too good to be true" disbelief is an on-going pattern throughout the pages of the Bible.

Moses and the people of Israel faced inevitable death –

trapped between Pharaoh's armies of and the depths of the Red Sea.

So when God parted the waters – it must've seemed too good to be true ...

The deliverance of this liberating Lord.

Blind Bartimaeus sat hunched by the roadside begging –

with no hope that his life would ever change.

So when Jesus restored his sight – it must've seemed too good to be true.

The compassion of this healing Lord.

The terrified woman cowered at the feet of her angry tormentors –

as they hurled accusations of adultery.

So when Jesus not only refused to condemn her –

but offered her a new start in life – it must've seemed too good to be true ...

The mercy of this forgiving Lord.



All this gives us a clue to what it means for *us* to be witnesses today – as we are called to testify to what we believe.

Now that's hard.

I'm not going to pretend it isn't.

How can we *possibly* convince someone to believe that – to assent to the core tenets of Christian faith?

It can seem impossible.

How can we *ever* persuade someone to believe in – to put their trust and faith in God?

We probably can't.

But we can do *this*.

We can point people to the "too good to be true" God.

For a little “*too good to be true*” disbelief – can go a long way – towards drawing people into true belief –

as they rediscover – or discover for the first time – real joy and wonder and joy we find in God.

For just as God delivered Moses – God can also liberate *us* in *our* times of trouble.

So, when we’ve experienced God-given freedom – why not tell someone?

Share the “too good to be true.”

And just as Jesus brought hope to Bartimaeus – so Jesus shows love and compassion on *us*, too.

So, if we’ve ever felt this divine love and compassion, isn’t it good to pass it on?

Share the “too good to be true.”

Just as Jesus has mercy on the accused woman – so he also offers to forgive *us* and invite *us* into new life.

So, if we’ve discovered new life in Christ, how can we possibly keep that to ourselves?

Share the “too good to be true.”

And just as God raised his Son from death to life – so *we* too can know the unshakeable hope of eternal life in him.

So, if – for us – faith is a source and a foundation of hope, then we need to witness to that hope.

Share the “too good to be true.”

For *you* – the “too good to be true” of your faith might be –

A prayer answered in a time of difficulty –

An awareness of God’s presence in the bread and wine of the Eucharist –

A sense of meaning and purpose in life.



Yes. – It may all seem too good to be true!

But in sharing – our too good to be true faith – we fulfil Christ’s call to be his witnesses in the world.