

August 17th 2014: The Top Things That Declare True Belief:
John 14:1-6 / Matt 28:16-20: Baptism of Trevor Gould

You will see on the screen a picture of the Poster that we have at present outside our church, and I admit that when I drove by and glanced at it, the first thing I noticed was the bold print heading, Top Ten Ways To Get Into Heaven. And my immediate reaction was one of disbelief.

That's so wrong, was my initial thought. There is only one way into heaven. Then I looked at the list underneath the title and realized that there was only one entry, and by having just that single entry the poster is declaring exactly that. For there is indeed only one way to live with God forever and that is Jesus. As our reading from John 14 shows:- Jesus clearly said, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except by me.

&because Jesus was the Son of God only He could make such a statement as this. He was saying that the only way to heaven is by believing and trusting in Him. Our human efforts, as hard as we may try or as much as we may believe in them, are just not enough.

Yet if we trust in Jesus as God the Son and ask for His forgiveness, that is sufficient for our salvation. What a great comfort that is.

But then, as I thought further about that I realized that as a church, in our teaching and presentation of the Gospel, we are not content to just leave it there. For we know that true belief in Jesus Christ as God, and as one's Lord and Saviour, must be followed by things that prove that such a belief is the real thing.

So maybe we need another sign that says: THE TOP THINGS THAT PROVE YOU HAVE BELIEVED....or....THE ATTITUDES AND ACTIONS THAT FOLLOW GENUINE BELIEF

Of course the danger of such a sign is that **we** then prescribe a list of things that **we feel** should be followed. It becomes man's list rather than God's.

Or people began to act out those things in order to be acceptable without any true experience of belief, or believers fall short in some of those areas and begin to doubt that their belief in Christ is enough.

We already get that same type of hypocrisy and uncertainty in the secular workforce. I recall from years ago when I started work as a junior in a bank

that the organization prescribed certain behaviours, attitudes and actions that they expected from me as a sign of my commitment to their wonderful organization. And on the surface they got it. I dared not do otherwise if I wanted to keep my job.

That's not the way God wants His church to treat new believers, but He does want the church to encourage them to grow and develop in their faith, for such growth is proof that their belief has generated within them new life.

In a most wonderful way the people of God are called to be God's gardeners. And that's all God's people working together. Not just the Pastor's or Elders or other set apart people. Everyone of us is involved in the task. We sow the seed and God by His Spirit brings about its germination and it is then that our major task begins.

For as God's gardeners we are to expect growth to happen and for it to follow a Divine Pattern. So we care for the young plant and help it pass through each stage of that pattern. We don't expect it to bear fruit or flower before it produces the leaves, but we do look for signs from the very beginning that it is alive and growing.

And that divine pattern was given by Jesus to His followers after His resurrection and just before His ascension. We find it in our second reading from Matt 28:18-20.

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

After we have proclaimed the Gospel and God the Holy Spirit brings about new life we then make disciples. And the first stage in that pattern is baptism. We are to baptize new believers into the name of God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Not into our name. This act doesn't make them Baptists or Church of Christ. It's an act that testifies to all that they now belong to Almighty God. Life is no longer all about them, but all about what they will now do as servants of Christ.

So the outworking of a person's belief begins first at this place where they physically show what has already happened for them spiritually. Trevor will go beneath the water because he has already died to dependence on his own goodness and acts to save him and has trusted in the death of God the Son for forgiveness. His coming above the water is a sign of the new eternal life God the Father has given him through the resurrection of Jesus. His going out of the water is a picture of his desire to live from this day as a follower of Jesus by the power of God the Spirit.

As Trevor was talking to me last Wednesday about baptism he told me how surprised he was to read in the NT so much about baptism. It was the usual thing, he said, that when people became believers that they were baptized. Indeed it was so important that often it was the very first thing they did as Christians.

There have been times in the past when I have talked to Christians about baptism and they have said to me, 'I don't feel ready because I'm not a good enough Christian yet. And I remind them that Jesus told us to first baptize and then to teach and encourage them to obey all His teachings. That's the divine pattern.

So if today you are witnessing Trevor's baptism as a believer and yet you have not been baptized, then you are out of tune with the Divine pattern for your growth and you need to do something about that.

And if today you are here but have not even considered becoming a Christian then may Trevor's stand spur you on to doing so. For the reality of this life is that believing in Jesus and following Him is the only way into heaven, and to go on living your life for yourself without even considering that is, I feel, very foolish. For this life is just so fragile. It can end any moment. So seek the Lord now while He can be found. Put your full trust in Jesus now while He is here. Turn to Him and commit yourself to growing in Him, for only then will you find the certainty of eternal life.