

## From the Pastor

Mary and I thank all of you for the very generous Christmas present which was presented to us Christmas Eve morning. We are very grateful. And we appreciated the week of vacation we enjoyed after Christmas.

\*\*\*\*\*

I'm planning on doing another Adult Sunday School series on basic Christian beliefs on the Sunday mornings of Lent. (Those Sunday are February 18 to March 25 and the Adult Sunday School meets from 9:00 to 9:45 a.m. downstairs in the Ezekiel room.) I led another such series a year ago this past fall. That series went pretty well, but I've been thinking how I can make things better this time around.

So, I've been thinking. And I've been wondering just what a belief is. We have beliefs about things; we have beliefs about God. But we don't believe in our beliefs the way we believe in God; they are two different things. We believe certain things about God; we have ideas about God. One of those beliefs we may have about God is that God is trustworthy. If this is what we believe, we then will trust in God in what we say and do, in what we think and hope. These two things are certainly related, but it is not our beliefs about God that save us; it is God who saves us.

These beliefs we have been given by the Church, the beliefs that have been passed down to us through the centuries, are like tools. We don't just have beliefs. We don't just hold certain beliefs. We use our beliefs. We use them to try to rightly understand ourselves in our relationships with other people, in our relationships to the world, and in our relationship to God. What do these beliefs tell us about who we are? What do they tell us about what it is to be a good human being? What do they tell us about this world in which we live? What do they tell us about that great power by which all things are, ourselves included?

We use these beliefs, these tools. We put them to the test. And insofar as these beliefs really do help us understand ourselves in all of these relationships, insofar as they really do help us live, we say that they are true. We can then tell others what we have found to be true and challenge them to use these beliefs, to test them, to see for themselves if they aren't true.

Pastor Neal