The subject today is believing. It’s hard to think of anything that is more terrifying these days than this whole issue of believing. And the reason of course is that in our present day, people it seems are willing to believing anything. Believing at this point, for me, is the scariest thing out there. It’s just terrifying to me to listen to what people believe and what we are willing to believe. I was listening to a documentary recently about the war in Ukraine. And they were interviewing a Russian woman who completely believed the massive Russian propaganda about the war. She said that the United States started it. Did you know that? That we were the aggressors, and then went on with all the usual about the Ukranians being Nazi’s and all the rest. Sh

e believed it without question. And we’re just the same in this country. You listen to what people believe and it’s just stunning. And the terrifying thing is that you can’t do anything about it. It wouldn’t matter what you showed her, or what you said, she would believe. Believing is the scariest subject on the planet.

I remember when I was in college many moons ago, and I was in a Bible class, I think it was some Old Testament class. And I remember our professor asked us this question. “If one day, archeologists found the body of Jesus laying in a grave somewhere, proof positive, would you still believe? Would you still be a Christian? And just about everyone in the class said, yes they still would. I remember thinking, yup, it doesn’t matter to me. Nothing will shake my beliefs. That’s scary. That is terrifying. This way in which we are willing to believe and avoid any evidence or truth or investigation. Believing has just gone crazy.

Now I think it’s not hard to understand why believing has become so dangerous and destructive. We’re looking for security aren’t we? In the old days they built castles. And around the castle they would build this big wall. And then, maybe a moat around it. And the bridge would fold up. Yeah, we need security. We want safety. Keep us safe, it’s a big political slogan. Keep us safe! So we need a strong defense, something that will shield us from the danger.

Well, what’s better than believing to shield us, protect us, wall us off, from the danger? Yeah I just believe what I believe and I don’t care what anybody says or what any evidence is, or any information, it just doesn’t matter. This is what I believe. It’s the perfect defense. I can just believe what I believe and I’m safe. I don’t have to deal with any information that upsets me. And in a world like ours, that seems to be getting more dangerous and uncertain, what’s the result? This willingness to believe anything. The more uncertain things become the more rigidly people believe. And I would argue that this is exactly what is happening in our world today. The scariest thing about our world is how we have learned to believe. I don’t have to listen. I don’t have to think. I just believe. I’m the true believer. Nothing is scarier for the future of our planet I think.

Believing can cover all kinds of fear. The fear of being wrong. The fear of having to change. The fear of having to start over. The idea that I might be wrong about what I believe? Think about what that Russian woman would have to face if she learned that she was totally duped. It can be hard to be wrong. Hard to change. Hard to start over. It’s tough enough if you have to start over financially, or lose your job? Imagine what it’s like to discover that what you believe isn’t ture? It’s easier, isn’t it, to just believe no matter what.

Today our Gospel lesson is about believing. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe. And these things are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, What does this mean to believe in Jesus? Let me give you an example of what I think believing means from the point of view of the Christian faith. I’ve heard this many times from people here, and this is good stuff. And we’ve probably all gone through this process of learning what it means to believe in Jesus Christ aa the Son of God.

Ok, here’s the example. We’ve all been children in families and grew up in one. And when we were kids, at some point we all pretty much thought the same thing about our parents and adults in general. And what did we think? Yup, they don’t know much. I know I really believed it. Out of it, old fashioned, don’t listen, don’t get it. How many times have I heard this? Yeah, most of us go through this as kids right? Our parents don’t have a clue. We’ve got it all figured out right? And we truly believe it.

But what happens? We get older and then we have kids and something happens. What happens? Yeah you begin to get it that what you believed isn’t exactly true. And one day your kid, who when he was 15 thought you were out to lunch, might come to you can say, “you know, now I can see that you weren’t quite as dumb as I thought you were. It’s almost a universal experience isn’t it. Learning that what we believed as kids wasn’t quite right.

So what’s happening there? Yeah, you’re learning to believe. And what do you believe about your believing? Yeah, that the way I think about things is a little off. I’m going to have to change. I’m going to have start over and rethink what I always believed. I’m relooking at things. In the church we call this repentance. Rethinking, relooking, starting over. Isn’t this what it means to believe that Jesus is the Son of God. I can repent. I can learn where I’m wrong, where I need to change, where I need to start over. Repentance applies just as much to what I believe as to what I do. So what is believing? Learning to trust that God will show where my beliefs need to change, need improvement, and where I need to start over. It’s growth, it’s learning, it’s becoming new. It’s God’s Spirit at work in me. Repentance applies just a much to what I believe as what I do. This is believing in God, and not our own believing. How much would it change the world if we understood believing to mean that what we believe is always imperfect and needs improvement.

Our cultural believing is toxic, because it’s afraid of being wrong, afraid of having to change, afraid of starting over. All that our faith says believing is, repentance, rethinking, relooking, our culture uses believing to avoid. Every week we come and confess that we have to change, that we can start over. That’s believing. That’s believing that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. Knowing that you have a lot to learn. Believing doesn’t shut you down, it opens you up. Yeah, it involves a little humility. But that’s what we believe isn’t it? Isn’t that the path Jesus took?

Our Gospel lesson today is a beautiful lesson on the nature of what it means to believe in God and in his Son Jesus. The Gospel of John is all about believing. And all through the Gospel the disciples have these moments where they think they believe. Right before Jesus goes to the cross the disciples say, “now we know that you know all things, and do not need to have anyone question you; by this we believe that you came from God.” Oh, now they’ve got it. They think they have this believing thing down. But Jesus tells them this, “Do you now believe? The hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each one to his home, and you will leave me alone. They had a lot to learn didn’t they. That’s a great way to think about trusting in God. I have a lot learn about believing.

Same thing in our lesson today. What do they believe now? They think it’s over. That they’re done for. But when God shows up they’re all going to discover what? Where they were wrong, where they would have to change, where they would have start all over and rethink it. Thomas, all the disciples would have to start over. See, that’s the gift. That’s God working in their lives. Jesus blows their minds. Takes them out of what they thought they knew and brings to them something they could never have dreamed of. And it’s exactly the same for us. It is a cross to be sure, learning where you’re wrong, where you need to improve, and learning to start over. But show me a person who is following that way and I’ll show you a person that is a rock solid witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They’ve learned what it means to be a believer. Show me a person who thinks they have their beliefs all settled and don’t need a reset, and I’ll show you a person whose in the way, not of the way.

It’s interesting that we look back on previous generations and we say. How did they ever believe that? Or think like that? Rest assured that will happen to you and I. One day, future generations will look back on us and say. What? You believed what? That will help immensely to put believing in proper perspective. We live in a culture where believing has become toxic and scary. A way to avoid discovering where we’re wrong, need to change, and start over. Believing in Jesus as the Son of God is just the opposite. It’s believing that God will show me where I’m wrong, where I need to change, and where I need to start over. And that applies just as much to what I believe as to what do. It’s called repentance and forgiveness and It’s nothing to fear. It’s new life. It’s called resurrection to something new. It’s the meaning of our creed. This is a believing desperately needed in our world today. Amen.

I remember this was I think the main thing that the church of my youth was about. Making sure that we believed. Or that we said we believed. And what that seemed to mean as a I recall was that we accepted certain doctrines or teachings as fact.