

SERMON SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

Just believe

How does each sermon connect to this theme?

The Chief Apostle's yearly theme, and the focal point for the beginning of the year sermon, comes from the story of Jairus' daughter in Mark 5. Faced with the news of his daughter's death, Jesus challenges Jairus to "Don't be afraid; just believe!"

In this new year, we can take this challenge to heart: in the face of devastating news (5:35), overwhelmed with a chorus of negativity or untruths (5:38), confronted with ridicule or insult (5:40), when we don't know where else to turn (5:23), Jesus tells us - "Don't be afraid; just believe!" Each sermon this month will continue to encourage us to *just believe!*

* Please note the adjusted format of the year beginning service to center the message of our Chief Apostle via video.

We are invited to celebrate Epiphany in our midweek sermon, where we can join with Simeon in believing that **He is the Savior**.

In the second Sunday, we find Jesus in the temple, about His Father's business, where it becomes clear that **He is the Son**.

On the third Sunday, the sermon will start with Jesus' encounter with John the Baptist, but will continue to explore the names ascribed to Him by His first disciples, who come to believe that **He is God**.

On the final Sunday, through Jesus' miracle at the wedding in Cana, we come to understand that **He is here**, and when Jesus is here, His identity is revealed, His glory is revealed, and wonder enters our very earthly, human situations.

Returning to Mark 5, Jesus taught Jairus in those dark moments to approach uncertainty with hope in the future, a calm composure even when surrounded by turmoil, and confident trust in Him. May these actions guide us in the months and weeks ahead in 2026.

Wishing you a blessed New Year!



John S. Schnabel

JANUARY 2026

January 4 New Year's Service

Don't be afraid.
Just believe!

January 7 Just believe: He is the Savior

January 11 Just believe: He is the Son

January 18 Just believe: He is God

January 25 Just believe: He is here

SERMON SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

BASED ON THE DIVINE SERVICE GUIDE FOR JANUARY 4

DON'T BE AFRAID.
Just believe!

Where are we in the Bible?

In Mark 5:21-43 two stories are interwoven. The stories deal with the condition of morality; Jesus and His disciples bind the stories together while the other two characters, the woman with the flow of blood and Jairus, represent striking contrasts and similarities. Jairus is named, male, wealthy, a leader of the synagogue, a parent concerned over his sick daughter, who approaches Jesus publicly to ask for healing, but receives a far greater miracle in private. The woman is nameless, poor, excluded from the synagogue; she has no children and cannot have any. Concerned with the "living death" she bears in her body, she approaches Jesus secretly and is healed, but is compelled by Jesus to answer His question, "Who touched Me?" making her experience public. Both come to Jesus with faith derived from hearing about Him from others, and both respond with fear and amazement. Both the woman and the girl are given life, the ability to become life-givers, and are restored to their communities. Both are called daughter. One is twelve years old, the other afflicted for twelve years, yet on the same day, when all seemed hopeless, each is delivered to new life.

Our text comes from Jesus' interaction with Jairus after hearing that the girl has died. While Jairus came to Jesus believing and hoping, he becomes fearful. Jesus challenges him to overcome his fear and continue in belief: *Don't be afraid; just believe!*

NEW YEAR'S SERVICE

Mark 5:36 excerpt (NIV)

Don't be afraid; just believe.

FOUNDATIONAL READINGS:

Scripture

Mark 5:21-43

Catechism

1.4.2

Discussion Questions

How do you relate to the characters in Mark 5:21-43?

What does anxiety, worry, and uncertainty feel like? Share your experiences from this past year.

How does understanding yourself as a victim limit your view of a situation?

Why is who we believe in more essential than what we believe in?

Describe the Peace of the Risen One. What does it bring into your life?

SERMON SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

BASED ON THE DIVINE SERVICE GUIDE FOR JANUARY 7/8

JUST BELIEVE: He is the Savior

Where are we in the Bible?

This account is commonly known as the Song of Simeon and takes place in the temple in Jerusalem during the presentation of Jesus. About 40 days after His birth, Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple in obedience to requirements of the law: the purification law and the law concerning the firstborn. According to the Law of Moses, a woman was to undergo a purification rite after giving birth. In addition, every firstborn son was to be dedicated to the Lord and accompanied by a sacrificial offering. Simeon, a righteous and devout man led by the Holy Spirit, recognizes Jesus as the promised Messiah and breaks into a prophetic song of praise.

This service celebrates Epiphany, which takes place on January 6. In the Christian tradition, it highlights the visit of the Magi, symbolizing Christ being made known to the Gentiles. In the Christian calendar, Epiphany closes the Christmas season and emphasizes Jesus as the light who reveals God's salvation to all people.

What are the key themes based on the Bible verse, its context, and the DSG?

1. Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promises
2. Jesus is salvation for all people
3. Jesus is the light of the world

EPIPHENY

Luke 2:29-32

Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all people, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel.

FOUNDATIONAL READINGS:

Scripture
Luke 2:25-40

Catechism
4.4.2

SERMON SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

BASED ON THE DIVINE SERVICE GUIDE FOR JANUARY 11

JUST BELIEVE: He is the Son

Where are we in the Bible?

This story is the only New Testament account about Jesus as a child other than the birth narratives. It bridges the gap between the infant Jesus' dedication in the temple (2:21-39) and the beginning of His adult ministry. Following Jesus' circumcision and presentation at the temple, His parents returned to Nazareth, where "*the Child grew and became strong in Spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him*" (2:40).

Luke then picks up the story just prior to the time when Jesus reaches the age of accountability at thirteen, according to Jewish law. He portrays the young Jesus as a precocious boy who astonished the teachers in the temple and amazed His parents (2:47-48). Jesus' prescient response to Mary's frustration-filled question in verse 48 ("*Son, why have you done this to us?*") is the focus of our sermon today.

What are the key themes based on the Bible verse, its context, and the DSG?

The phrase "My Father's business" from our Bible verse can mean either "My Father's house" or "the house of those who belong to My Father." Our two themes evolve from these definitions:

1. Belonging to God - "*I must be in My Father's house*"
2. Belonging in community - "*I must be among those belonging to My Father*"

Believers find the Father in the place where His word comes to life, where believers share their faith in fellowship, and where people love one another.

OUR VISION STATEMENT: A church in which people feel at home and, inspired by the Holy Spirit and their love for God, align their lives to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and thus prepare themselves for His return and eternal life.

Luke 2:49 (excerpt)

Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?

FOUNDATIONAL READINGS:

Scripture

Luke 2

Catechism

4.5.2

Discussion Questions

Discuss the two meanings of "My Father's business."

How is belonging an intrinsic need for humans? How do you feel that you belong in your congregation?

You belong to God. What does that tell you about yourself?

Define what "home" means to you. How can you help create a home in your congregation for others?

What is one new thought you walked away with?

SERMON SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

BASED ON THE DIVINE SERVICE GUIDE FOR JANUARY 18

Where are we in the Bible?

We find ourselves standing on the banks of the Jordan River, in the opening chapter of the Gospel according to John. The leaders in Jerusalem have sent a delegation (priests and Levites) to investigate a man causing quite a stir in the wilderness: John the Baptist. John is a preacher outside the religious mainstream. He is not found in the temple courts or among the scribes, but out in the desert, proclaiming a message of repentance and readiness. His message is *eschatological*; he speaks of the coming judgment, and the restoration God has promised.

In this passage, their interrogation of John the Baptist unfolds in two parts. First, they ask about his identity (1:19–23): “Who are you?” Is he the Messiah? Elijah? The Prophet? John answers plainly that he is none of these, only a voice crying out in the wilderness, preparing the way of the Lord. Then, they question his activity (1:24–28): “Why then do you baptize?” What authority does he have to do this? John points them away from himself and toward the One who is already among them, One far greater than he. And when Jesus finally appears (1:29–34), John’s voice grows clear and certain. **Though he is humble about his own identity, he is bold about who Jesus is.** He identifies Him first as “*the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*,” and then as the One “*upon whom the Spirit descended*,” and “*the Son of God*.”

What are the key themes based on the Bible verse, its context, and the DSG?

1. Knowing who Jesus Christ is
2. Knowing who we are

The “world” - The “world” is a general term that denotes what is contrary to the will of God or that which is evil. In the first epistle of John, the world is defined as the creation that is in the grip of evil (1 John 5:19). In the Gospel of John, the world refers to all the forces that are in opposition to Christ: the light (Jesus Christ) came into the world, and the world did not receive Him (John 1:11). These forces are not only at work around us, but also lives within us.

JUST BELIEVE: He is God

John 1: 29-31

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is He of whom I said, ‘After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.’ I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water.”

FOUNDATIONAL READINGS:

Scripture
John 1: 1-34

Catechism
8.2.4, 3.4.8.2

Discussion Questions

Who is John the Baptist? What is his mission?

Review John 1 together, and find and discuss each title of Jesus.

Who are you in Christ? What is your identity as His disciple?

How did the sermon inspire or instruct your understanding of the Bible verse and/or its context?

SERMON SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

BASED ON THE DIVINE SERVICE GUIDE FOR JANUARY 25

Where are we in the Bible?

After Jesus' baptism and the calling of His first disciples (in chapter 1), the Gospel of John seems to show life returning to normalcy in chapter 2. They go to a wedding and then travel back to Jesus' hometown. However, on the contrary, this is a very important story, set in the midst of ordinariness. The story's significance comes at the end, when it is recorded that in this first miraculous sign, Jesus' "*revealed His glory.*"

Through this story, we can come to understand how Jesus' actions reveal who He is. We can recognize and bear witness to His quiet glory. In communion we come to Him as the host of an abundant meal today, but also look forward to the eschatological joy of the future feast.

What are the key themes based on the Bible verse, its context, and the DSG?

1. His revealed identity
2. His quiet glory
3. His presence, now and in the future

JUST BELIEVE: He is here.

John 2:9-11

When the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom. And he said to him, "Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept the good wine until now!" This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested (revealed) His glory; and His disciples believed in Him.

FOUNDATIONAL READINGS:

Scripture
John 2:1-12

Catechism
3.4.8.5

Discussion Questions

Discuss how Jesus' words and teaching demonstrate His identity.

"Obedience to uncommon commands often yields uncommon results, when we believe in who Jesus Christ is." – How is this portrayed in the New Testament? How have you experienced this in your life?

When have you witnessed the quiet glory of Jesus Christ? When have you felt the wonder of the divine entering into human, mundane concerns?

Describe the abundance of the table of communion.