

The Great Tradition of People Who Love to Repeat Themselves – Tyler Merrill-Cranston

John 20:19-31

I have descended from a great tradition of people who love to repeat themselves. My Grandpa Al's word was "Okay". It really was unbelievable how often he used it. And in combination with his obsessive compulsive cleaning disorder, it made for great impressions of what it was like to take a shower at his house.

"Okay, so the door to the bathroom here stays open, okay. But the door to the bedroom you can shut. These windows over here, okay, you need to open. And turn the fan on. That takes the moisture out of the air, okay? Okay? That's how a fan works. Okay now after that, you can grab a towel from the closet. Grab one big towel and one wash cloth, okay. You can set it here on this shelf by the shower. Now let me show you how these sliding doors work, okay."

From there we still have to learn about how the hot and cold knobs work, when during our shower it's okay to turn them, how slowly to turn them, what the different soaps are, how long we should shower for, how to dry off when we're done, how long to leave the fan on afterward, and then of course the recap. Okay.

Whenever my sisters and I did these impressions my mom would remark, "Just imagine what it was like growing up with him." And although my mom is *a million* times better off her dad, she didn't quite make it to adulthood without inheriting some of his tendencies toward repeating herself—especially when she is ticked off about something. I remember complaining all the time as a kid, "Mommmyyyy I get it!", after she had circled around a thing for a half hour.

Well, now that I'm married, I have been kindly informed that I too love to repeat myself. I especially like to do so when I feel that I've made a great point, when everybody is saying "Mmmm" and nodding in agreement. Elise will just tell me, "Yeah Ty, I already heard you say that" (as if it might not be so impactful the fourth time around).

But I've descended from a great tradition of people who love to repeat themselves—not just my family, but the Church. When I was younger and went to a more evangelical church, that tradition was carried on in the form of six-minute worship choruses. Now that I'm here, it's not carried on so much in music, but it is in just about everything else we say on a Sunday. So my family and I have just been carrying on the honorable tradition of the saints.

John sure is on a run with the word "Believe" this morning, isn't he?! He uses it six times in the last seven verses of his gospel. And if it were me, I'd be doing that because I'm trying to make a really good point, so let's lean on in.

Now I know what Belief means, because it was my number one strength on the StrengthsFinder test. Who else has Belief in their top 5? Does anybody else have it as their number one? Yes, so I know darn well what Belief means: it means that I already know pretty much everything so just listen up and I'll tell you how God wants this to go.

No, that's not really what belief means. I was a college student so I know that to believe means to intellectually assent to something. That's why I had to quit reciting parts of the Apostles' Creed when I was a student—I just couldn't honestly say that I believed in things like the virgin birth when I didn't really think they were scientifically possible.

But as it turns out, to believe, in the context of John's world, did not mean to intellectually assent to something. I discovered this while reading Kathleen Norris' book, *Amazing Grace*. She says, "I find it sad to consider that belief has become a scary word, because at its Greek root, "to believe" simply means 'to give one's heart to'. Thus if we can determine what it is we give our heart to, then we will know what it is we believe."

So what is it that you give your heart to? I'm guessing that the first things coming to your mind are things that fill you with life: your friends, marriage, church, community, passions, kids... In his final words, John urges us over and over again to give our hearts to Jesus, so that in doing so we may find life.

And specifically, John urges us to give our hearts to Jesus, as the Son of God. John also repeats himself here in the form of giving Jesus titles. First on the lips of Thomas, *My Lord and my God*, and then in the last verse, *the Messiah the Son of God*. Now it's important to know that these titles carried a whole different kind of weight in John's time than they do today. And that's because there was another person in the Roman world who went by them: the emperor. The emperor wielded all the power in the known world—the power of the greatest military, of unlimited riches, the power to decide who lived and who died, of where to drop the Mother of all Bombs—the greatest power in all the known world. That was... until Jesus, the true Son of God, who has a power even greater, the power over death.

Believe it! Believe it! John tells us over and over again—by which he means, give your heart it! If you, like Thomas, have a hard time giving your heart because of your mind, that's okay. But rather than concluding like him, "Well then, I will not believe," respond instead, "Lord, I believe, now help my unbelief"—or, in other words, "Lord, I give you my heart, now help me with all these questions!"

I'll be putting this into practice as soon as I sit down and we start reciting the Apostles' Creed. If you think I started saying the parts that I use to omit in college because I have finally now wrapped my mind around them, you're crazy. I still have so many questions about what the virgin birth means, and don't even get me started on the resurrection from the dead.

But Jesus said, *Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to **give their hearts***. So if you too cannot yet see clearly, but are willing to give your heart, let's join our voices with the great tradition of people who love repeat themselves, trusting that in doing so, we will find life.