

The Psalms Greatest Hit

“Trust”

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July 24, 2016

It is good to be back after a week-long mission with our students in Dinuba, CA. This is my 5th year joining the team on this mission trip and every year a continue to be amazed by the work that our young people put forth as they work in the 100+ degree heat to take fruit that has been donated by local farms because it was not good enough....and through working in the factory to cut and process it, and laying it out in the hot central valley sun, picking it up and packaging it, we are able to send 44,000 pounds of preserved food to those in need throughout the world.

I think what inspires me most about this particular mission trip is the amount of trust I see all around me while I am there. The directors of the organization trusting that farms will donate thousands of dollars' worth of extra fruit every day to process.....the trust I see in the students relying on one another to work just as hard as they are so they job can get done....the trust that some have in the first place to come on this trip....because it takes a HUGE amount of trust to pay \$200 to go work in the hot sun with no air conditioning and the promise that at the end of the week you will be inspired and have fond memories that will last a lifetime.....

On paper...it doesn't make sense.... But yet...God always shows up and works in big ways...and those who trust and join us discover that.

So on the heels of that experience I am glad to report that we had a fruitful week and get to share with you all this morning some ideas I thought about when it comes to trust.

Last week, we began a new summer series that is rooted in the Psalms...the ancient songs found in the Hebrew Testament of the Bible....and we are also using more modern music....that from the last 40 or 50 years to compare and contrast how we are still singing some of these same ideals today...perhaps just with slightly different words.

Our series began with Pastor Ron preaching on the psalmist reflections on the apparent absence of God. In those times of despair and trial where we feel God has abandoned us. We reflected on the words of the Psalmist which Jesus would later repeat on the cross “My God, My God, Why have you forsaken me?”

And we thought about how in those times of trial, lament and argument with God that we can come out on the other side with new life...and deeper relationship with our creator.

But in order for that process to work, there of course has to be some amount of trust.....whether that be trust that God is listening to our lament and frustrations....trust that God loves us through that time....trust that we can survive into new life through that trial....

So this morning I want us to look at three aspects of trust that I feel are necessary for us as we attempt to live out this Christian life.

This first, is probably the most obvious and one that most would expect to hear in a sermon on Sunday morning. Trusting in God.

But trusting in God can be much more complicated than we think,

It is one thing for us to say we trust God will provide us with Guidance and wisdom while deciding which house to buy....or whether or not we should take that new job offer....

It's another thing to say we trust God when the doctor tells us that there is nothing that can be done to treat the disease at this point....

Or when your husband or wife tells you they want a divorce...

It's a whole other thing to trust God when a family hears gets news that their 11 year old was hit by a speeding car while riding their bike in Danville.

Or a three year old stopped breathing and didn't make it during a dental procedure in San Ramon.... Trusting God can seem like such a simple concept but it can be so difficult to do sometimes....

While we are on our mission trip this week we were joined by 3 other churches as well as a small group of international backpackers who were staying at Gleanings.

And early on in the week a long-term volunteer offered to take some of the backpackers from Taiwan to a nearby Hume Lake for an afternoon of swimming.

While on the Lake, 1 of these young men....a 20-year old medical student named Ken decided he wanted to swim across a narrow part of the Lake.... A no one knows exactly what happened during his swim but the rest of his group quickly realized he was gone.

Lifeguards from the nearby Hume Lake Christian Camp, the sheriff and fire department all responded in record time but it wasn't until the Dive Team came in the next day that Ken's body was found.

A 20 year old...there one minute...gone the next....one of the youth from our church was the last ones to talk to the group before they went off to the lake and there was nothing but joy....but in an instant...everything for them had changed.

As I found out the news...I remember walking out of the dining hall where it was announced and looking out at hills lined with peach trees I couldn't get the first 2 verses of this morning's Psalm out of my head:

**I lift up my eyes to the hills—
from where will my help come?
My help comes from the LORD,
maker of heaven and earth.**

But then the big questions began to surface for me....what is there that God could do to possibly rectify this situation....because I can't imagine the pain that his friends and fellow travelers are going through....I can't imagine what it is like for his family who is scattering to get on a plane to SFO from Taiwan after hearing this terrible news...What in the heck is the maker of heaven and earth going to do for all of those affected by this loss?

But...I started to hear the stories from the full-time staff about what was going on behind the scenes.

It turns out that as soon as the Taiwanese consulate heard the news they contacted all of the Taiwanese folks who live in the Fresno area. And many if not every single person they contacted dropped what they were doing and came to Gleanings to support Ken's friends.

Even the Consulate General drove straight from San Francisco to be at gleanings to be with Ken's fellow travelers as well as the Gleanings staff during this time.

And in that time, God I can faithfully say that God was present and comforting and connecting the Ken's family with these Americans who had just recently become friends with him.

God was there working to bring people of different cultures together in love.

I know this because I saw the hearts and minds of the many of the staff of Gleanings change.

For those of you who haven't heard much about this mission site before...many of the full-time staff at Gleanings come from conservative non-denominational, Baptist or Pentecostal denominations.

They are folks who would not be ashamed to stand here and say they believe that professing Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior is the **ONLY POSSIBLE WAY** to get to Heaven...

But...the spirit of God moved in a very interesting way this week.

One of the staff who had been there for many years...who professes and preaches a Biblical Literalist view and who staunchly conservative views of God and Salvation got up and spoke to us.

And he shared that the Ken and his family were Buddhist. And that as the liaison between Gleanings and the family, he was the one who had to be involved in helping plan the funeral. Because it turns out in Ken's religion and culture...it is very important to have a ceremony at the site of where he passed away...because his family believes this in some way free his spirit.

And this staff member said *“Five years ago...if you were to tell me that I was to help lead a Buddhist Ceremony there would have been no way I would have done it.....But I Gods presence is so clear to me in this situation and I as a father and talking with the Ken’s father know that the spirit of God is at work and dwells among us regardless of the name we are giving our religion or our God...”*

A self-avowed bible thumping, born-again, evangelical Christian...feels led by the spirit of God to take part in and help organize a Buddhist funeral for a Taiwanese man who he had only met a couple days before and who was just passing though....

**I lift up my eyes to the hills—
from where will my help come?
My help comes from the LORD,
maker of heaven and earth.**

We put our trust in the fact that God works in many ways to help us in our time of need...But my experience, one of the most common ways God comforts us it is through the love, kindness, generosity of other people. This leads me to our next aspect of trust I would like to offer up this morning....Trusting one another.

One of the church things we teach our 8th graders when they begin their confirmation class each year is the definition of “church.”

Because we fall into this idea that the church is this building that we sit in on Sunday mornings...but the reality is that the church is people.

The church is you and me.....we are the church.

And for those of us who have taken the step to become members of the church we have entered into vows saying we will support “the church” in 5 different ways----Through our Presence, through our prayers, Through our Service, Through the sharing of our gifts and through out witness.

And I’ll be honest...the first time I took those vows I felt like I was saying those promises in order to uphold the institution...to uphold the structure and the buildings...and while those things are partially true...I have come to

believe that those vows really have to do with supporting the people that make up the church more than anything else.

To be present with my fellow Christians in both times of joy---like new birth, marriages, baptisms, soccer games, choir concerts, housewarmings....

And to be present with my fellow Christians in times of sorrow---the loss of a loved one... through times of illness and hospitalization....to be with people when it comes time for them to accept that they have to move into a nursing home... or hospice care.

We vow to pray for one another....and indeed we practice that vow during our sharing of joys and concerns each week....and we celebrate the wonderful prayer ministry that our church has....where dedicated members come here each and every week to lift up those requests you write on the prayer cards to God.

We vow to share our service....going on mission trips together....through volunteering to lead youth on mission trips so they can experience being the hands and feet of Christian in the world. Through serving one another by bringing meals to those who are shut in...or picking up and driving others to church on Sunday morning....

We share our gifts with one another...we take one another out to a meal...we pitch in when we know someone in our community is struggling to make ends meet....we work together to provide the means for refugee families to get a fresh start in our country.

And last but certainly not least we vow to share our witness with one another and those outside of the church. One of the ways we can do this is through small group ministry.

Let me take a moment to say...if you haven't looked into small groups you are missing out. Not only are you missing out on developing new friendships and deepening existing friendships...but you are also missing the chance to live out your vow of witnessing how you see God working in your life and hearing from others about how God is working in their lives.

So besides trusting God...we have to trust one another and trust that each one of us is going to do everything in our power to uphold those vows of membership. We are going to trust that as United Methodists we are going to strive to be a community that follows the 3 general rule of being church:

-To do no harm to one another

-To do good for one another

-And to participate in things that keep us connected to and centered on God.

Now, I want to be sure to say that because we are all imperfect people...there will be times when we let one another down....times when we feel we misplaced our trust.

But I assure you, for every instance I've been let down by someone in the church...there have been 50 instances of people who have come through for me and for others in ways I never dreamed possible.

Trusting in one another is well worth the risk...and it is necessarily because God so often works through other people....To trust in God means we have to trust in God's people...we must trust in one another...and we must honor that trust that others have given us and do our absolute best not to let them down.

Trust God....Trust One Another....Finally, I'd like to offer one last aspect of trust that I find important as we live out our Christian life... We must in part Trust Ourselves.

Now in many ways....learning to trust ourselves is inherently tied into trusting God.

Because what we are really doing when we trust in ourselves is trusting in the unique gifts and graces that God gave each one of us.

Now...I know there are some in this room who may trust in themselves a little too much....so much so that they start to forget to trust God and others as well...

But I also know that there are many here who have started to those trust in who God made them to be...

Because others have told you that you will never be good enough...

Or because some say you are too old.....

Or because someone told you that you're too young...

There are some here who have lost trust in themselves because what they used to be exceptionally gifted at no longer holds true...and they believe that there isn't possibly anything else they could do of value.

But I want to say this as clearly as I can: If you are breathing....you are valuable and of sacred worth!

No matter what labels other have put on you...no matter how much you don't think you measure up when you look at yourself in the mirror....you matter....you have the ability to make a difference somewhere and somehow.

I love the gospel reading we have before us this morning.

This story where the disciples encounter Jesus walking on water in the storm and Peter jumps up and says "I want to do that too, Jesus."

"Jesus, if it is truly you, call me out on the water..."

It's a reminder that Jesus is not just God...Jesus is our teacher...and what is the whole point of teaching...but to allow your students...your disciples to someday be like you....to teach the things you taught and do they things you do.

And so here we have Peter jumping out of the boat so that he may be like his teacher.

But...the moment is short lived...and Peter begins to sink..... "Save me Lord!" he shouts.

And what happens...Jesus catches him....because our trust isn't misplaced when we put it in Jesus....but then Jesus asks this big question of Peter...

He asks "why did you doubt?" "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

Theologians have had different interpretations of this story...some saying Peter doubted God's power....or Jesus' power...

But I prefer those who theorize that Peter's doubt had nothing to do with God or Jesus' abilities...but his own....

After all...when Peter is in trouble he calls out for Jesus to help him. He wasn't doubting Jesus' power....Jesus still stood on that water....

No it appears to me that Peter doubted himself.

Peter doubted that God gave him the ability to be like Jesus....

I think it can be really easy for us to look at the life, words and deeds of Jesus and say... "well I'm going to give it a shot...but c'mon...that's Jesus and I'm me....there is no way I'm ever going to get close to that level...."

But the fact is that Jesus wouldn't have called students...he wouldn't have called disciples if he didn't believe they could learn to be like him.

In John's Gospel there are some power words Jesus shares with the disciples before his death...he says "*I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.*"

One of the most frequent questions I get asked a United Methodist Pastor is "What Makes United Methodism different from other Christian Denominations." And while there are a few different answers, one of them is in our belief that *we are moving on to perfection.*

Meaning...as we work to Do no Harm...to do good...to stay in love with God...and as we work to uphold those five vows of membership we are moving closer and closer to a life like Jesus'.

And we put our faith in the fact that someday....probably a day far from here...but nonetheless someday...we can be like Jesus....

We aren't perfect yet...not by a long shot...but with God's grace...and walking hand in hand with one another we can get there.

Trust In God...

Trust In One Another...

Trust in Yourself....

As part of our series on the Psalms...we have been looking at modern songs that speak to each weeks theme...and I came across a song that I felt spoke in both the love and comfort that God provides for us as well as the companionship we are called to have for one another.

For this week's song, we will be hearing "I'll Stand By You" originally performed by the pretenders in 1994. Since that time it has been re-recorded by various artists such as Country-Western star Carrie Underwood and most recently appeared on multiple episodes of the hit Fox show "Glee."

I believe this song speaks to me because of the empathy that it conveys...an empathy God has for us...as was shown in the incarnation of Jesus and an empathy we are called to have for one another....

Let's Listen....