

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"Deepening Trust in God"
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Every relationship is built on trust. We emerge from our mothers to the outside world and immediately begin to bond with mom. There our sense of life and well-being occurs as we bond well and trust Mom to provide our needs as we did implicitly in the uterus. Bonding and trust go hand in hand. Where bonding fails, trust fails. There are a variety of examples, but the most severe that I have met is a six month old once who had been fostered by friends of ours and she had been abused already at that tender age. She would not look any person in the eye, certainly no adult. She would turn her head away. She needed special care and therapy. She had been taken away from her drug addicted parents, and our friends were being trained in what her special needs will entail.

So trust is not to be taken for granted. Many of us have some issues trusting people. Even here in this culture of warm hospitality and friendly greeting from strangers, nevertheless some of us still fear trusting others, because our trust has been violated at some time. Therefore trust is earned slowly.

And so when I begin to talk about trusting God, I realize there are as many different backgrounds in the room as there are people. Some of us will quickly want to learn more about trusting God and deepening our trust in God. Others will have a much harder time. All of us depend deeply on grace to trust God and to trust others.

Today's service is placed between Thanksgiving Sunday and Reformation Sunday (next week). The great themes of the Reformation are that we need grace alone from God to believe, faith alone from God to believe, and the Scriptures alone from God to believe. Grace comes as a gift. Being able to trust God (one definition of "faith") comes as a gift. The Scriptures and rightly understanding the Scriptures also comes as a gift.

These gifts cannot be earned but they can be received. Faith cannot be earned, but it can be received. So, to use a modern or post-modern metaphor, God is broadcasting. The question is not the transmission but the reception. How can we receive what God wants us to receive?

First, openness to the very person of God. Second, openness to the love letters of God. Third, responding to God in our attitudes and our actions.

Paul wrote to a young man named Timothy. Timothy was a young pastor who was trying to help the fledgling congregation he was serving. He needed insight and help from the veteran apostle Paul. So Paul wrote him a number of pointers on what to do, how to keep one's focus and actually grow while being a minister, a pastor.

He encouraged Timothy to keep being open to God the way he had been since he was very young. Paul urges Timothy to "continue in what you have learned and firmly believed" (3:14, NRSV). Two things here in terms of being open to God. One, learning about God. Two, trusting and believing that what you have learned is true. Today, we can no longer assume that people have a basic understanding of the Bible, even those who have grown up in the church. A recent poll noted that when asked if younger respondents could name one of the four gospels, the majority could not name even one, let alone all four, let alone the teachings of Jesus the Messiah.

We live in an age which no longer can assume Christian memory. So for us who need to learn, we need to make time to learn, and be disciplined in reading. We need help, which is why we offer Bible Studies, which are safe places to learn at many different levels of learning. But I am getting ahead of myself. We read the Scriptures to know Jesus. We need to know God better, and be committed to know God. Openness to that relationship is primary. Then we ask how can we know God? And that leads us to the love letters of Scripture. I say the love letters, because a great deal of effort is expended to let you see that God is a heart sick father who sees his children making all kinds of rebellious choices that will lead them farther and farther away from the life they are really looking for, a fulfilling life of love. But as the father of the prodigal didn't force his sons to work for him, nor even stay close to him, neither does our God force us. He does many creative things to attract us to himself.

The Scriptures are his stories, and history, to teach us first about relationship with Him and then about behaviour and the mission we have together. Unfortunately, the Bible has been misused as well as underused and so we need help to hear it. Timothy had been taught in the Scriptures by his mother and grandmother, and Paul noted that this was a secure basis to build his ministry upon.

Paul noted that the Scriptures were just what we need for instruction, refutation, correction and discipline or training in what is right. All of us have a ministry as Christians. You may not see yourself as a minister, but you are. The question is not whether every Christian has a ministry or not, it is rather how well we will perform that ministry. That ministry first of all comes from our relationship to Christ, then from how well we have been educated. Now I don't mean how much primary, secondary and post-secondary education we have. I mean how well we have taken into our relationship with God the Scriptures upon which we base that relationship. So Paul wanted Timothy to know that he needed a good Scriptural understanding to be educated in ministry, then that those same Scriptures can be used to refute or rebuke others who are drifting away from God, then continually be corrected himself by those Scriptures, and then growing for the rest of his life in what is right by listening to the one voice that comes through the many authors of Scripture, the voice of the One Speaker who has breathed out or inspired this Book we call the Bible.

You might say all of this is very basic and you would be right. The problem occurs when we lose sight of the basics, not only in theory but also in practice. So we know that we need to know the Bible better, and the One who has brought us His Book. We need to be thoroughly equipped to minister by using God's word appropriately. That's the why the Church has historically offered all kinds of Bible Studies and small groups to get to know the Book and one another better.

The Church has also offered Prayer Groups and Meetings historically because again it focuses us back on the One who can address our lives, in crisis and in the good times, when we have nothing and when we have plenty...kind of makes me think about the traditional wedding vows... for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health... so that we might be informed and equipped in our ministry.

But few choose to take the time. So all I can encourage you to do is to be one of the few. And I'll do all I can to make sure that everyone here has a chance to enjoy the Scriptures more than on Sunday morning.

I mentioned prayer groups because Jesus encouraged prayer in the Luke 18 reading. He basically said, "Don't give up." God isn't like that unjust judge. He really does want to give you what you need. It's easy to give up

praying, otherwise why is it recorded that “Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.” The question is whether we will persevere in prayer and whether Jesus will find people trusting him when he returns. That’s what the last question in verse 8 means. Will there be anyone left who is trusting God when Jesus returns, “...will he find faith on the earth?” Paul told us in 2 Timothy 3 that the Lord will certainly find narcissism, self-absorbed activities and attitudes: **2** For people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, **3** inhuman, implacable, slanderers, profligates, brutes, haters of good, **4** treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,

These things are pretty easy to see even now. So the question continues to be, “What are we doing with our time, energy and resources to become better lovers of God?” And as we honestly ask ourselves that question, then we can address what it means to deepen our trust in God, because love and trust are so amazingly bound together. The great commandment and the great commission are both based on this trust, love God and one another, make followers of Jesus everywhere.

As we risk this trust, so we enter the center of the faith.

And God directs us, as we choose to listen.

Let us pray.

