

“Trust More”
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Overbrook Presbyterian Church
4th Sunday of Lent
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First Scripture Reading: Micah 6:6-8

⁶“With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? ⁷Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” ⁸He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Introduction

As we move through Lent, we continue to reflect on passages of scripture which draw our attention to God’s desire for us to live lives conformed more closely to God’s will. This passage from the prophet Micah poses the question of how much can we sacrifice to earn God’s favor. The answers soar ever higher from what might be considered normal (burnt offerings and calves a year old) beyond the realm of what is even possible (Not just a river of oil, but *tens of thousands* of rivers of oil!?!), to what is blatantly immoral (first born). And yet the heavenly reply is that God does not want ever increasing amounts of sacrifice. What God wants, as was the case with Isaiah, the Psalmist, and Amos, is not more rituals, but lives lived as a reflection of God’s will.

This passage reminds us that we too, are the people of God and that we too, have been called to lives that more closely reflect God’s will. Giving something up as a part of our Lenten observance is a nice ritual, but it is meaningless if it is not accompanied by adding practices that will bend our lives more closely to what God wants them to be. What God really desires of us is changed lives that reflect a desire to live into the principles of God’s Kingdom. With this in mind, we continue our Lenten series which explores spiritual practices we can *add* to our lives to enrich our faith and strengthen our walk with God.

Second Scripture Reading: Matthew 7:24-29

²⁴“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. ²⁵The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. ²⁶And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!” ²⁸Now when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at his teaching, ²⁹for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.



Sermon: “Trust More”

In God we Trust. It’s on all our money and since 1956, it’s actually been the official motto of the United States; But, is it true? Do we, as a nation, really trust in God? What does it even mean to trust in God?

In one of the Bibles on my shelf, there is a cross-stitched bookmark given to me by a friend many years ago. On it are the words of Proverbs 3:5-6: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight.” It was intended to be a nice bit of wisdom shared between friends. But as much as I appreciated the gift and the time and effort that went into making it, the message it carried troubled me. “What does it mean to trust in the Lord with all your heart?”

The word “trust’ can be used in a variety of ways. It can mean to rely on someone. Will Carl be here to pick me up by 8:00? Yes, because I trust him. He is reliable.

Trust can mean that you know what a person says is true. George Washington is said to have never told a lie. He is very trustworthy.

A classic group building activity is the trust fall. I stand with my back to the rest of the group and fall backward, confident that they will catch me before I hit the ground.

But in the context of the church and in our lives of discipleship, Trust carries the connotation of belief that inspires obedience. To trust a leader is to follow her and to obey her orders. To trust Jesus is to commit ourselves to listening to what he says and putting his teaching into action in our daily living.

There are lots of people who exhibit this kind of trust in God throughout the Bible story:

- Abraham trusted God when God told him to leave his home and “go to a land that I will show you,”¹
- Moses trusted God when God told him to go back to pharaoh to convince him to “let my people go,”²
- Mary trusted God when she was told that she would bear a son who would be called the Son of God,³
- The disciples trusted Jesus when He told them to drop their nets and follow him.⁴
- Peter trusted Jesus when he stepped out of the boat at Jesus’ invitation and started walking out to Him on the water.⁵

Trust is a big principle in the Bible. It is closely related to faith, but it’s also different. In my mind, faith in God leads us to believe in what we cannot see, but trust is what leads us to obey what God teaches us. When I see a bridge, I believe it will hold me up. But trust is actually stepping out onto it.

Now, I’m not talking about accepting the Bible as the literal word of God and trying to do everything in it. Several years ago, an author by the name of A.J. Jacobs spent a year trying to do

¹ Genesis 12, 1-4, NRSV

² Exodus 3-13, NRSV

³ Luke 1:26-38, NRSV

⁴ Matthew 4:18-22, Mark 1:16-20, Luke 5:1-11, NRSV

⁵ Matthew 14:28-29, NRSV

just that. He wrote a book about his experiences called “The Year of Living Biblically: One Man's Humble Quest to Follow the Bible as Literally as Possible.”⁶

He tried to keep the famous rules like the Ten Commandments and “Love thy Neighbor,” but also the obscure ones like not wearing clothing made of mixed fibers and not shaving his beard.

About the book he writes this:

*[It is] An exploration of some of the Bible's startlingly relevant rules. I tried not to covet, gossip, or lie for a year. I'm a journalist in New York. This was not easy. [But it was also] An investigation of the rules that baffle the 21st century brain. How to justify the laws about stoning homosexuals? Or smashing idols? Or sacrificing oxen? And how do you follow those in modern-day Manhattan?*⁷

Good questions. So, trusting God does not necessarily mean accepting everything in the Bible literally. But Jesus does a significant amount of teaching in the gospels that we don't always pay attention to, but we should. Oh yes, we know what “love your neighbor” means and we do our best. “Those who live by the sword will surely die by the sword” is one of Jesus' teachings that is sort of especially bedeviling these days.

But trusting more means trusting that the way Jesus teaches us to live really is the best way to live and then striving to do so. And that's a challenge, because Jesus doesn't teach things that are always particularly easy.

In our scripture passage this morning, Jesus describes two kinds of people. Though he doesn't use the word “trust,” that's what he's talking about: those who hear his words and acts on them are like the wise man who builds his house upon a great rock. With a firm foundation, that house can withstand any storm.

But those who hear and do not act, those who do not trust their teacher, are like those who choose instead to build their homes with a foundation set in sandy soil. When the high winds come and floods rage, the house is washed away because there is nothing beneath it to hold it firm.

So, who are the ones who build their house on the rock? Jesus says that they are “Everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them...” Which words is he talking about? Well, it's worth pointing out at this point, that this passage comes at the very end of Jesus famous Sermon on the Mount. Which words does Jesus mean? Those words. So let's take a minute to review what's in that Sermon; the teaching that Jesus wants us to trust:

⁶ Jacobs, A. J. *The Year of Living Biblically: One Man's Humble Quest to Follow the Bible as Literally as Possible*. Simon & Schuster, 2009.

⁷ Jacobs, A.J. “The Year of Living Biblically.” *AJ Jacobs - Official Website*, A.J. Jacobs, ajjacobs.com/books/the-year-of-living-biblically/.

1. It's in the Sermon on the mount that we hear Jesus turn the social hierarchy upside down.⁸

Most of us have heard the beatitudes. Nine times Jesus calls something “blessed:” the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, and those who are reviled and persecuted because of Jesus.

Notice that these are people who *do* what Jesus does and who *live* like Jesus lives. Notice also that the things we so often consider signs of God’s blessing, things we strive for like wealth, power, privilege, prestige, are nowhere to be found on this list.

Can we trust Jesus enough to live like the ones he calls blessed?

2. Jesus says the way we live matters in this world.⁹

It’s in the Sermon on the Mount that he famously calls Christians salt and light. Salt brings out the best flavor in food. Being salt of the earth means our lives of discipleship should help bring out the best in the world. Likewise, if we are the light of the world, then we are supposed to live as shining examples of God’s love and mercy and goodness for all the world to see.

Can we trust Jesus enough to live lives that are salty and bright?

3. Jesus revisits old laws giving them, new, more challenging meanings.¹⁰

This is where we learn that an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth are not what God wants of us, but rather to turn the other cheek, and to go the second mile. But we also remember that these are not advice to give ourselves over to more violence, but rather to refrain from answering violence with more violence and to make it more difficult for our abusers to treat us as less than the children of God that we really are.

This is also where Jesus takes an old standard, “Love your neighbor and hate your enemy” and radically changes it saying “Love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you.”

In this world that seems to value winning at all costs, can we trust Jesus enough to shun violence and be loving towards those we call enemy?

4. Honor God with our lives and worship¹¹

Our personal piety is a private matter as are our prayers and our service. We are not to make a show of our discipleship, but to serve and love God quietly. It is here that Jesus teaches us to pray humbly, and honestly, and simply, and it is here that we find the words of the Lord’s prayer as a model for our own prayers.

⁸ Matthew 5:1-2, NRSV

⁹ Matthew 5:13-16, NRSV

¹⁰ Matthew 5:17-48, NRSV

¹¹ Matthew 6:1-18, NRSV

Can we trust Jesus enough to continue worshipping God outside of this place; to make our lives an act of worship? Can we worship and serve in a way that only brings glory to God?

5. Keep our priorities straight.¹²

It is in the sermon on the mount that we are told to not store up for ourselves treasures on earth; that we can't serve God and money, we have to pick one. It is here that we learn not to judge others and to take the plank from our own eye before we start trying to dig the speck out of another person's eye. And it is here that Jesus teaches us not to worry so much about the things we tend to get so tied up in knots about.

Can we trust Jesus enough to rely on God's will as the source of our peace more than we rely on money and power and control?

6. Be Relentless in Seeking after God.¹³

Jesus teaches His listeners to strive to do God's will. "Ask and it will be given you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you." And the final instruction, the one that sums up so much of what it means for us to live in community together, is found here too, in the words we have come to know as the Golden Rule: "In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you..."

We've heard that last bit our entire lives. Can we trust Jesus enough to live that way? Every day?

There is a lot more to the Sermon on the Mount and there is plenty of Jesus' teachings that are not covered in these three chapters of Matthew. But it is worth spending some time redefining what it means to be a disciple of Jesus and to live our lives in the way that He teaches us to live.

You see, it's very easy to call ourselves disciples and to say that we put our trust in Jesus, but the proof of that should be found in the way we live. Trusting in Jesus means striving to live as He taught us to live and trusting that what God wills for us, really is what is best for us.

I remember reading the story once, about a man who grew up in London during the second world war. He wrote about his experiences during the blitz, when the German Luftwaffe tried to bomb England into submission.

During one attack, the bombs were falling close to his home, and so his father grabbed him by the hand and together they ran out of the house. Nearby there was a crater from a previous attack, so his father dove into it, and then called for his son to follow.

¹² Matthew 6:19-34, NRSV

¹³ Matthew 7:1-12, NRSV

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Reflecting on how frightened he was as a small child in the middle of a hellish wartime nightmare, the author described how he could hear his father's voice calling from the darkness of the pit for him to "jump in." Terrified, he yelled back "I can't see you!"

But his father, looking up at the sky tinted red by the glow of the fires, yelled back to the silhouette of his son, "But I can see you. Jump."

It can be scary and hard to do. It might not make any sense. It may even seem crazy sometimes, counter-intuitive, radical ... But, being a disciple involves a great amount of trust that the way Jesus teaches us to live, really is the best way for us to live. Jesus patiently calls us. It's our job to trust.

To God be all glory, honor, power, and dominion, in this world and in the world that is to come. Amen.