

June 12, 2022

Texts: Psalm 8; Romans 5: 1-5

Title: "A Question of Trust"

Does it seem to you that it's getting harder to trust anybody? It seems to get more and more discouraging to simply answer the phone or open an email for fear of being taken by a scammer or a hacker. I saw several emails this week come through that appeared to be from someone I know but it said to click on a link. If you see an email like that, delete it immediately. Then, of course, there are all sorts of investment scams, like Ponzi schemes or pyramid schemes. Health care fraud's a growing scam industry. There are moving van scams, in which a person hires a crooked moving company that either doesn't show up to do the job or steals the homeowners' valuables. And the list goes on.

The financial losses from all these scams are staggering. But the biggest thing is the loss of trust. It's hard to recover from a violation of trust. It hurts when we put our hope in the wrong people. Trust is such a fragile thing. When we trust in something or someone and they deceive us, we are left angry and disappointed and we're less likely to trust anyone in the future.

**It's especially painful when we question whether or not we can trust God.**

There are people, even in church, who believe in God but their trust in God is a bit shaky. And because they don't trust God, they miss out on the peace, joy and hope that God would give to them. Can such a thing happen—that we would lose trust in God? Well, sure. It happens all the time.

**Whether we admit it or not, many of us have a faith that's largely**

**conditional.** As long as things are going well for us, trust is easy. But when things aren't well, our faith seems to slip away.

Dr. Ronald M. Brown, a former professor at the University of Minnesota, writes that we need to recognize two categories of trust, whether we are dealing with people or dealing with God. There are the "Iffers" and the "Untillers." Iffers refer to the thought that "I'll will trust you **if** you live up to my expectations." "Untillers" refers to the idea that I will trust you **until** you violate my expectations. Every person has their own list of "ifs" or "untils" whether they realize it or not.

So, what are your "if" and "until" criteria for trusting God? For many it's like, "God, I'll trust you as long as everything is going well." "I'll trust you until something bad happens to a member of my family"

**I would say that the presence of suffering is the number one obstacle that hinders our trust in God. That's only natural. It involves that age old question, 'why do good people suffer'.** A man named Rob Davies from Horsham, Australia, wrote an article a few years ago about how an unexpected tragedy caused him to turn away from God. Rob says that before he became a Christian, his life revolved around accumulating things and drinking alcohol. He had spent time in and out of various rehabs and treatment programs. But at a Salvation Army service one night, Rob and his wife made the decision to trust their lives to the Lordship of Jesus, and Rob's lifestyle and attitude changed immediately. All was well and good.

However, not long afterwards, Rob's wife died suddenly. He was left a single dad with two young daughters. Being a new believer, Rob didn't understand how a loving and powerful God could let this happen. He struggled with his questions.

Years passed. Rob rarely attended church during this time . . . and he returned to drinking heavily. He remarried, but he and his new wife both struggled with alcohol abuse, and eventually they divorced. After that, Rob says he "gave up on life." He blamed God for his heartbreak. How could he trust a God who would let him suffer like this?

Many people find themselves in that dilemma. We believe that God is the measure of all that is good and loving. We believe that God is all-powerful. So why doesn't an all-powerful and loving God just end our suffering, not to mention, for the rest of the world as well?

In our Bible verses for today, Paul addresses that very question. Remember, Paul suffered horribly for his decision to follow Jesus, so he wasn't into empty promises or fake faith. He wanted to protect this new community called "the church" from discouragement, from giving up when they were persecuted, when they faced suffering, when they felt hopeless.

How does our faith in Jesus affect our ability to deal with the challenges of our life today? Starting in verse 3, Paul writes, ". . . we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, that has been

given to us.”

This is why Paul could trust the goodness and the power of God even in his suffering. By the power of the Holy Spirit living in us, Jesus walks with us through our every struggle and heartbreak and challenge. We’re not alone! The strength and love of Jesus empowers us to persevere. And when we persevere, we grow in the likeness of Jesus. And as we grow more like Jesus, we grow in hope. We can put our *full trust* in the hope of Jesus. No scams, no deceit, no violations of trust.

And that brings me back to the story of Rob Davies. One morning, he hit rock bottom. He got down on his knees and began praying for help. He prayed, “Jesus, I give you my heart; I give you my life. I choose you, Lord.” And Jesus answered his prayer and he was motivated to get back to his recovery program. And he said, “Now there’s no turning back.”

**And that brings us to the point of it all this morning: it’s through our suffering that we truly understand the love and hope of God.** Suffering, if we don’t let it turn us away from God, leads to perseverance, and perseverance leads to character and character results in hope. And what is that hope? It’s that a God who loves us so abundantly will, as Romans 8:28 reminds us, “work all things for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

Faith in God does not eliminate our problems, pain, and challenges. It does give us a hope that never fails and a love that never gives up on you and me. On this we can place our trust! Amen.