

A Time for Trust
Cabinet Worship
John 14:1-14
May 2020

14 “Don’t be troubled. Trust in God. Trust also in me. ² My Father’s house has room to spare. If that weren’t the case, would I have told you that I’m going to prepare a place for you? ³ When I go to prepare a place for you, I will return and take you to be with me so that where I am you will be too.

Trust in God. Trust also in me, Jesus says to his disciples. The New Testament Greek word can be translated into English two different ways: believe or trust. Many of us may have learned this passage from John as “believe in God, believe also in me.” But for me there’s a big difference between believing and trusting!

To believe something is to know it, mostly in our head. I believe what I’ve seen or experienced or what I’ve been taught. Beliefs are important because they provide direction for us. I believe in gravity so I don’t recklessly jump off high places! And I believe in gravity because I’ve also experienced it!

Likewise with the beliefs of our faith. Belief is expressed in our creeds, such as the Apostles’ Creed. I have been taught these beliefs and they impact my faith and therefore, I hope, my way of living.

We often equate our faith with belief almost exclusively. I believe so I have faith. But let’s admit it: some days it’s easier to believe—in God, in resurrection’s hope, and in the goodness of others. We all find ourselves having at least a few moments (often during the night) fearful and worried. When it’s difficult to believe, we wonder about our faith.

It’s like the poem found written on the wall of a WW2 concentration camp by a Jewish prisoner entitled, “I Believe,” which says:

I believe in the sun
even when it is not shining
And I believe in love
even when there’s no one there
But I believe in God
even when he is silent
I believe through any trial
there is always a way.

Then the poem shifts from belief to trust:

May there someday be sunshine
May there someday be happiness
May there someday be love
May there someday be peace...

Trust isn't just about what I think or know; it's what I count on, stake my claim—even my life—on. If belief is in our head and thinking, then trust is in our heart, even deep in our bones. Trust is an important component of our faith.

Maybe the difference between belief and trust can be described like this:

Rabbi emeritus, teacher and scholar Lawrence Kushner tells how he was working with a group of Jewish junior high school kids. He asked them if they believed in God. And he was hoping, as a good teacher, that some would say yes and some would say no, and it would create a dynamic discussion. But no one said that they believed in God; not one! Kushner was devastated. He remembers thinking 'So it's come to this, 3,000 years of piety and struggle and agony for a bunch of suburban kids that don't believe in God.'

And then later on in the discussion, he inadvertently asked them 'How many of you have felt close to God?' And every kid raised a hand. Somehow being close to God—at Shabbat when the mother lit the candles, or outside in nature, or some other profound experience—was more real to them than “believing” in God; believing in one's mind seemed to come and go or at least take a while to develop. Feeling close to God was what they wanted—and I suggest, that's what trust is: trusting that God is there no matter what the mind thinks on any given day.

The opposite of trust isn't distrust but anxiety and worry. And that's why I like “trust in God, trust in me,” as Jesus spoke to his disciples. That too was a time of great anxiety and worry. As I've pondered before, after 9/11 people rushed back to church but then dropped off. Was it that we didn't focus enough on developing trust in God and went back to making sure people believed all the right things? When your world is turned upside down, all the things you thought you believed in—like skyscrapers should stay in the sky—or now, all the things that we suddenly have are overturned—plans of all kinds, not being free to come and go as we please—it's all upside down in what we thought we knew and believed about our lives. Belief just doesn't get you through the night!

But trust does...when I wake up in the middle of the night and try to go back to sleep, I'll tell you, I don't recite the Apostles' Creed! I slowly say the 23rd Psalm. Now that's a trust-builder: the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want! A parent doesn't sing the ABC song as a lullaby—that's a song that teaches but it doesn't strengthen trust and assurance. We need songs, psalms and messages of trust and assurance in our lives right now to strengthen our faith!

In one of the churches I served for many years, we sang an anthem a lot, especially at critical times: “Surely It Is God Who Saves Me...I will trust in him and not be afraid. For the Lord is my stronghold and my sure defense and he will be my Savior.”

We began singing it during Desert Storm. One woman had a number of family members deployed into the war effort. We prayed for them every week and we frequently sang the song.

You have to understand: she and I didn’t always see eye to eye, meaning we didn’t always “believe” the same way about things. She would tell people that I worried more about her family than she did, meaning she was trusting in God more than me! That she had more faith than I did! Maybe so! Many of the people in the church believed very differently from her about the war, but they sang the song as a prayer, seeking to trust in God for themselves as well as for her.

While people didn’t see eye to eye on some things during that time—and she was often the outlier in the community—she relied on the strength and support that only a community of faith can give and that is unattainable on our own. As is often the case, our differing beliefs caused animosity at times. But when we sang together “Surely It Is God Who Saves me, I will trust in him and not be afraid,” we were as one.

The passage from John says whoever trusts in Jesus will do the works that he does. And I think love for one another is one of the works that Jesus would have us do. Trust requires a community. That’s why church!

We can do this—we can get through—together, staying strong and supporting each other when there’s a need.

Surely it is God who saves us, let us trust in him and not be afraid, for the Lord is our stronghold and our sure defense and he will be our Savior.