

Sunday, October 18, 2020

Exodus 33:12-23 | Thessalonians 1:1-10 | Matthew 22:15-22

Trusting in God and Imitating Christ

“Trust in me- You can believe in me. Trust in me; just in me; Shut your eyes and trust in me. You can sleep safe and sound knowing I am around.” These are the words sung by Kah the serpent who tries to befriend Mowgli in Disney’s “The Jungle Book”. The snake’s soft spoken words invite the boy to carefully listen and to surrender to him. The boy falls asleep thinking he is safe in the coils of the snake but when awakened, he realizes it is a trap. Sometimes we trust others and only realize that we shouldn’t or that there is a reason not to trust. So what are we supposed to do?

How many times have you heard the words- Trust me—I know what I am doing! Only to realize again that the other person does not and there will be repercussions because of it. Just who do you trust in the world today? It used to be that when you listened to the broadcast news it was accurate and to the point; no opinions but facts. But now that we live in the era of ‘fake news’ we cannot totally trust those who are offering the most accurate updates. Yet there is a need for trust in our world, in our country and the provinces and this has been made clear to us because of the pandemic. We need to trust each other and to work together.

Prior to the covid19 pandemic the political leaders were not always given much credit but when the medical officers of health both nationally- Dr Tam and across the provinces were given opportunity to speak, the country listened. So too do we listen locally by Dr Wajit Ahmed through his daily report. The question of trust is foundational to any relationship and in this pandemic the political leaders are trusting the medical officers to tell us what is truth and doing so very well. This is not always the case for government leaders at any level but the medical officers are sharing the truth of a second wave and are encouraging us to be and stay healthy.

Who do you trust? Just think about those people you trust on a daily basis without acknowledging this relationship. We trust the people who produce the essential products we use every day- from our food, cars, gas, electricity, clean water and we are grateful to what we receive. We trust the mail carriers, bus drivers, cooks and chefs in restaurants—all to do what they do to their best ability. We even trust our pets to behave in certain ways and to be comforting when needed. And we trust that family members and our closest friends will ‘be there’ for us because of the relationship we have and share.

But what about God? How much do you trust God? Sure we state we believe in God and all his abilities- but do we really trust God to do what he says he will do? Our reading from Exodus 33 tells the story of Moses and God's trust issues being resolved. Moses has lead the people of Israel from Egyptian slavery into a long journey in the desert. The people have not lived as they should while on this journey. God prepared the laws by which they were to follow on stone tablets. However, when Moses saw that the people had turned away from God, he broke the tablets and in this action, the trusting relationship with God was also broken. God had trusted Moses to take these laws to the people. Moses questioned God because there was unrest amongst the people. The people were tired of their journey and wanted to do what they felt right. They also questioned Moses' leadership and their ability to trust God. But Moses knows that the people need to trust God to see them to the Promised Land. So he again talks to God about the laws and he asks to fully know and experience God to show to the people that God was really in charge. Moses asked God to "show him His (God's) glory". Moses trusted God but wanted the people to trust God too. Moses wanted God to trust him on this request for the sake of their relationship to be made stronger. God agrees to this revelation of self but only partially. It is then when Moses goes into a crevice on the side of mountain and God passes by while protecting Moses at the same time. The trust relationship is thus made stronger between God and Moses.

The people needed to trust that God was really with them on this journey. And so do we. We need to remember that God not only created us but that He continues to guide our lives. We need to trust him and to live out this trust every day in the midst of celebrations of life and love and especially in those times when we wonder why things happen as they do. We need to trust God with our lives—but often we don't because we are unsure what this really means.

Jesus understood this dilemma because the people were unsure of where to put their trust. The Pharisees and the Herodians wanted to entrap Jesus in what he was teaching. They flatter Jesus with words "Teacher, we know that you are sincere and teach the way of God in accordance with truth and show deference to no one, for you do not regard people with partiality." That is, you do not show favouritism in any way. But what do you think about this: do you think it is lawful to pay taxes to Caesar the emperor or not?

Jesus knew that they were trying to test him. He says, "You hypocrites, why are you putting me to the test? Show me the coin used for paying the tax. He looked at it and asked, "Whose head is this and whose title?" "The emperor's," they replied. Jesus stated, "Give to

Caesar the things that are the emperor's and to God the things that are God's." After hearing this, the Pharisees and Herodians were amazed and left Jesus.

Who are we to trust? Jesus makes it very clear- trust in God. To live our lives every day requires trust in God, not in idols, liars, people's opinions over facts. We are to trust in God for everything we need and whatever we do and wherever we go.

Paul wrote to the people of the church in Thessalonica that they are doing well because they believed the message shared with them and that they have been chosen by God as they learned to trust Him fully. They not only heard the words of the gospel, but they received the message in power in the Holy Spirit and they believed with full conviction. They were filled with joy through the Spirit even though they were persecuted. They placed their trust in God not only for themselves as individuals, but as a church. They also imitated what they saw in Paul and his leaders and learned to live by loving others as shared in the gospel message of Jesus.

What about you and your church community? Do we really trust God to lead us as we continue to live through this pandemic? DO we trust God to help us see what tomorrow will bring or are we really wondering in which direction our lives will head?

There are people who do not know what their lives will bring tomorrow. World Food Day is recognized by the UN on October 16 each year. Because of the pandemic food is more difficult to acquire for families not just in Canada but around the world. If people are living in poverty in a conflict zone; if they are older or with a disability there is a greater risk of hunger. Caregivers of those who become ill are most often women. Around the world and in some countries, schools have been closed so children are at home. The caregiver is often the woman and without her income there are food issues. Food issues include what the family can afford not just what is available. The problem arises is that what is purchased is usually less nutritious, and this contributes to malnutrition. In some countries food is abundant on farms but it is not able to go to market because people are not working and gathering in communities for the sale of produce. Some of these farm families are now selling livestock or tools for food because there is no social safety net. It will be years before recovery is possible but the main concern is food on tables now. But there is hope. Organizations such as Canadian Foodgrains Bank and World Vision are striving to reach those vulnerable farm and city families in need. They continue to offer assistance and they offer hope. These groups need to be trusted to do what they say they will do as they reach out to the vulnerable around the world.

We know locally that food banks across the city have seen the requests for food help rise significantly that shelves in some centres are rarely full. But there is hope. And this hope is found in God. It is easy to say this but what happens is other people see the need to respond to those seeking assistance. And God's Spirit touches their hearts and our hearts to do something-anything. But we need to trust others. We need to trust in God to show us what to do – after all He sees the big picture of what is happening in the world. He knows that thousands of people are testing positive for covid19 and that there are many people who are affected by each person affected. God knows that the world is in need of his healing hand not just for this disease but for the need to come to him and to put their trust in him. God's creation needs to trust in Him and seek to be healed once again. So where do we begin?

We begin by asking ourselves- in what/who/where do we put our trust. Psalm 118:9 states, "IT is better to take refuge in the Lord, than to trust in princes. "And we must. Proverbs 3 tells us to "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him and he will make straight your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes'; fear the lord and turn away from evil." Why? Because "it will be a healing for your flesh and a refreshment for your body."

Trusting in God includes having faith. Even when we don't understand God's plan for us, we need to trust in Him. And in time, all will be revealed and understood. We are also to imitate Jesus- by reaching out to others in need, by answering questions of faith through sharing one's stories of hope and joy and by telling others of the promised home we each shall have in God's heaven. We need to trust God to see us through this global pandemic but also to help us to become our better selves as we reach out to others imitating Jesus call to act in faith and with hope.

Kah's song called Mowgli to be hypnotized into thinking he would be safe. But when we hear God calling us to trust in him—he means it. He told Moses to trust him as he revealed himself. He also asked Moses to call the people together in order that they would know to trust in to get to the Promised Land.

We need to trust in God because we cannot live as independent countries because we are truly global citizens. We are on this planet and need each other to pull together. We need to cooperate, learn from each other and to grow in grace and with hope. We also need to trust God to guide us because He create all things and that He knows the big picture of what is to come. We need to trust God to show us the way to live imitating Christ in what we do and say.

Let us remember this as we hear this song:

How great is our God, how great is his name. How great is our God forever the same.

1. He rolled back the waters of the mighty Red Sea, and he said I'll never leave you. Put your trust in me.

2. He sent his Son Jesus, to set us all free and he said I'll never leave you. Put your trust in me.

3. He gave us his Spirit, and now we can see and he said I'll never leave you. Put your trust in me.