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Pentecost 01 – Holy Trinity – June 12, 2022

“A Question of Trust”

Read: Romans 5: 1 - 5/ Memorize: Romans 5: 3 – 4

Does it seem to you that it's gotten harder to trust? I had a telephone call from a person purporting that they were from an organization that I support. They wanted me to make a donation immediately, which made me distrustful. I asked them to send me a letter. I got the letter, so now I'll consider it. Emails present just as much a problem. Always delete any emails that ask you to do a favor by going and buying gift cards and reading them the numbers on the back. SCAM!

During the height of the pandemic one of the big scams was a romance scam. The loneliness and isolation of Covid 19 caused people to look online for romance. The Federal Trade Commission believes that about \$304 million dollars was lost by people to such scams in 2020.

Trust can be a very fragile thing. When we trust and are deceived, we are left with anger, disappointment and, sometimes, a sense of shame because we were duped. This can lead us to be cynical, disillusioned and less likely to trust in the future.

This feeling can impact our relationship to God. It is especially painful when we question whether or not we can trust in God. Many people believe in God, but they don't trust Him. Because of that, they miss out on the peace, joy and hope that is their rightful inheritance from a God, who loves them. Let me offer an example.

Potosi, Bolivia has been known for centuries for its rich silver, tin and zinc mines. Mining is dangerous. Many people lose their lives every year. This has resulted in a permanent superstition among the miners. The people are largely Roman Catholic, yet, when they descend into the mines they offer sacrifices to a devil they call Uncle Tio. They believe he holds the power of life and death underground, so they pray to him and offer rolled up cocoa leaves or alcohol to gain his favor.

A mine boss says, “Outside, we believe in God, who is our savior.” Down in the mines it's a different story. “We ask the devil for favors, sometimes on our knees. Our belief is split into two worlds.” I believe we can relate to that. We can live in two different spiritual minds, also.

We trust God in certain areas of our lives and withhold trust in others. What causes us to lose trust in God? The answer for many is that faith is largely seen as conditional. When life is going well, trust is easy. Sadly, when life turns against us, faith can turn fickle.

Dr. Ronald M. Brown, former professor at the University of Minnesota contends that we need to recognize two categories of trust, whether we are dealing with people or God. He breaks these categories into “iffers” and “untillers.” “Iffers” refers to the idea that I will trust you if you live up

to my expectations. Think about these, “I will trust you if you are honest, control your emotions and if you don’t exaggerate.”

“Untillers” refers to the idea that I will trust you until you violate some of my expectations: “I will trust you until you lie to me, talk about me behind my back, or violate one of the criteria from my “if’s” list.” Everyone has their own list when it comes to trust, but oftentimes they are not aware of the criteria until they see it in black and white.

As your pastor, I have to ask if you have “if or until” criteria for trusting God? You don’t have to put up your hands. I ask it for you to consider. You likely experience them because you are human. I don’t know what your “if or until” criteria are with God, but I would bet they revolve around the struggles and heartbreaks of life. A lot of time it has to do with suffering. That word sometimes make us think of tragic things. The New Living Translations uses the words problems and trials, which I feel gives us some better insights. They are normal things in life.

Problems and trials are the number one obstacle that hinders our trust of God. It often happens when we want to understand why something happened to someone we think of as good. In one way, there is an easy answer. There are no good people. We’re all sinners, so it should not surprise us that we have problems and trials.

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. He reports that before he became a Christian, his life revolved around accumulating things and drinking alcohol. He spent time in and out of substance rehab centers. At a Salvation Army service one night, Rob and his wife made the decision to trust their lives to the lordship of Jesus. Their lifestyles and attitudes changed immediately. All was well in this new life they’d established.

Then tragedy struck. Rob’s wife died suddenly. He was a single dad with two young daughters. Being a new believer, Rob didn’t understand how a loving and powerful God could allow her death. Like many who struggle with problems and trials, he abandoned the church and returned to what had been his first love, alcohol. He would remarry. Unfortunately, he and his new wife both struggled with alcohol abuse and eventually divorced. After his divorce, Rob says he “gave up on life.” He blamed God for everything that went wrong.

Many people find themselves in that difficulty. They believe that God is all powerful and that He is good and loving. When problems and trials come we may face a dilemma. We wonder, why doesn’t an all-powerful and loving God end all problems and trials, especially ours? That’s the issue that Paul is dealing with as he writes to the Romans.

When Paul became an apostle, he was told he would have problems and trials. God was true to his word. He had them galore, so Paul wasn’t into empty promises or fake faith. He wrote these words in Romans to protect this new community of followers from discouragement or from giving up when they had problems and trials.

Here's what Paul said to them and for us, as we deal with the challenges of life. After telling the Romans how we have gained access through faith to God's grace and can rejoice in it, he goes on to say, "We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love."

Because God's love had been poured into our hearts, through the Holy Spirit, we can trust God, even in our problems and trials. By the power of the Holy Spirit living in us, Jesus walks with us through every problem and trial. He understands our problems and trials because He Himself has endured them.

The love, strength and power of Jesus help us to endure. Enduring those things helps us grow into the likeness of Jesus. As we grow in Him, we grow in hope. That enables us to put our full trust in Jesus. He will never scam us, deceive us or violate our trust. He has given us the promise that He will always be with us. He always keeps His promises.

That takes us back to our 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 came alongside him. Rob has not had a drink since April 2018. He has healed from his hurt and anger and found the peace he'd been searching for from when his wife died.

He writes, "Today, my life is the opposite of what it used to be...God has given me peace, joy, happiness and an overwhelming desire to live, give and share how the love of Jesus changes lives. I have that strong feeling of excitement again because I know that Jesus is living in me. Now there is no turning back."

That brings us to the central messages of these verses: it is through our problems and trials that we come closer to Jesus. They lead us to endure, and endurance leads us to strength of character; that results in hope. Our hope is firmly planted in a God, who, as Romans 8: 28 reminds us "works for our good in all things."

Pastor David Platt tells of a woman who had lost a child to a congenital heart defect. She described how painful it was to sit in the waiting room while her second child, born with the same defect, underwent heart surgery. Yet, during that experience, she discovered something that was quite priceless. She came to recognize that even problems and trials can be a blessing for those who trust in Jesus. She wrote that she wouldn't trade that time her family had experienced for anything because of what it has taught them about God.

She writes, "This is the essence of eternal life, knowing God as He is. How often we are guilty of seeing Him as we like Him to be." She says she survived because she believed the promise of Jesus to be with her. She could trust Him no matter what the outcome would be.

It was Christ living in her by the power of the Holy Spirit, making His power perfect in her weakness that allowed her to persevere and find hope. It is only in our problems and trials that God's power is made perfect in our weakness.

Do you want to understand God as He really is? Do you want a hope that never fails and a love that never gives up? These things are found by trusting your life entirely to Jesus; enduring through life's problems and trials through the power of the Holy Spirit. According to the vision and promise found in these verses, one day, the glory of God that we hope for, will become the reality in which we live eternally.

Here's your question: How will you share your trust in Jesus with others?