



Sunday, April 7, 2019

Rev. Robert W. Brown

SERMON

The **C O U R A G E** to **T R U S T**

Psalm 71:1-6 5th Sunday of Lent

INTRODUCTION:

The Book of Psalms is a collection of poetic prayers and hymns. They express deep, emotional laments as well as joyous praise and elation. Some are angry and dark while others plead for intervention and rescue, and still other psalms are simply elegant lyrics of gratitude for God's vastness, beauty, faithfulness and power.

These great verses were written over *thousands* of years by many different authors, and yet even now they resonate with great relevance and meaning, echoing through the ages

our shared human condition.

Today's psalm is a prayer for **courage** in uncertain times. The poet seems to be remembering God's faithfulness in difficult times in the past and so can now trust that, no matter what comes, God will always rescue us.

Hear this reading from Psalm 71.

SCRIPTURE:

In you, O Lord, I take refuge;
let me never be put to shame.
In your righteousness
deliver me and rescue me;
incline your ear to me and save me.
Be to me a rock of refuge,
a strong fortress, to save me,
for you are my rock
and my fortress.

Rescue me, O my God,
from the hand of the wicked,
from the grasp of the
unjust and cruel.
From my youth, O Lord,
You are my hope, my trust,
I have leaned upon you
from my birth;
it was you who took me
from my mother's womb.
My praise is continually of you.



All through the season of Lent we have been reflecting on the topic of **COURAGE**. Each Sunday morning and in the Small Group gatherings throughout the week have been digging deep into what exactly courage is, where it comes from and how we might access it when needed. We have realized that it takes courage to

honestly seek the truth, especially when we would rather *not* know. We explored the kind of courage it takes to face the fear and anxiety of an uncertain future, and also the courage to change course when needed. Last week we took a hard look at the courage to take action over complacency. Now we reach the conclusion to our series, the courage to trust.

William Slone Coffin wrote that, "Faith is not believing without proof; it's trusting without reservation, life being impossible to live fully without trust."

Let us pray...

Lord God, in the darkness, fear and absurdity that often surrounds us it can be difficult to trust anything. Help us to know how we might rely on trusting in your lovingkindness and faithfulness. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be pleasing and acceptable to you, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Do you remember the good Ol' Charlie Brown routine where Lucy holds the football for him to kick and every time, just as Charlie Brown rushes full steam to kick that football, she yanks it away. Poor old Charlie Brown kicks only air and lands flat on his back...again! "Trust me", Lucy says, and time after time he does. One time, after he's been duped once again, Lucy looks down on him and says, "Isn't it better this way Charlie Brown, isn't it better to trust people."

I was maybe 9 or 10 years old when I was introduced to trust games. I remember my friend saying, "All you have to do is cross your arms over your chest, close your eyes and then fall straight back, but I'll catch you before you hit the ground..." "trust me." Well, most of the time, he did catch me. But in games of trust, 9 out of 10 just doesn't cut it. It's interesting to me that so many of these trust games always involve some kind of blindfolding. I think part of the deal is when you can't see where you are going, you have to have faith and trust someone else has got your back. But, if you play enough trust games, sooner or later you're trust will be betrayed.

I think we've all been burned by misplaced trust, and that's no game at all. Betrayal of trust is hard core pain. You willingly allow yourself to become vulnerable and powerless to put yourself at the mercy and grace of another person only to be crushed. Over time your trust becomes jaded and suspicious, like the Russian proverb that Ronald Reagan was so fond of using... "trust but verify".

I remember the first day of my first class at Emerson College, TV production 101. The professor declared with absolute authority and vast experience. "The number one rule in television production," he said, "is trust no one!" Sadly, in so many of my experiences, he was proved right, yet I just had to keep trying to kick that stupid football!

We live in an age, as never before, where falsehoods abound, masquerading as truth. Our ability to trust is constantly being undermined on the internet and media outlets every day. "Trust but verify" has never been a wiser proverb. After a lifetime of hard lessons, it really does take courage to trust. Yet, as Coffin put it, it is impossible to live fully without it. Isn't it better to trust people? Yeah, probably but at what cost? People will ALWAYS let you down. I will and you will. It's just that we are all imperfect, flawed creatures that don't always even know we're holding the football for you.

But the faith, hope and trust that the psalmist writes about is not in people. His faith is in a God, who is utterly reliable and only good. His faith is in a God who somehow sees only our goodness and keeps putting that football back in our hands, the God who is loving enough and strong enough to allow the betrayal. I think God knows that sooner or later we will find the courage to honestly see the truth of our actions. When we learn to trust in God's faithfulness, we find that all uncertainty will, in the end, be resolved and redeemed. After we have endured enough pain, we will repent and change course. Eventually we become strong enough to even take action. Maybe buy a tee to hold that football.

To locate where we put our trust unlocks the immense power of Love. Trusting that God is reliable is what fuels all our hope. Trust in a God who is actually for us becomes a fortress of refuge, a dependable solid rock that will hold all your weight and baggage.

Faith + hope = trust.

Faith in God, plus a tenacious hope in a Love that always wins, produces a ruthless kind of trust. A trust that frees us from the tyranny of present circumstances and is not bound within the limits of our own capabilities, culpabilities and failures.

Faith + hope = trust. This is the good news of the Gospel, the secret equation that ignites true courage. The story of Jesus is the proof text to the formula. Jesus showed us that no one is immune from pain or the sting of betrayal. Life is even more uncertain than we imagine and, in this realm, clarity is at best, a fuzzy, moving target. Through Jesus we learn that the heart of trust is not a vaccine

against innocent suffering or protection against injustice. The heart of trust finds the courage to walk through the chaos, not around it. In the end, when all seems lost and we are shrouded in darkness, and the pain is unbearable, the heart of trust follows in the way of Jesus and surrenders and says, "Into your hands I commit my spirit."

In these last weeks of Lent and Holy Week, I want to invite you practice this kind of ruthless trust. Instead of insisting the world be as you want it, accept life as it is. Instead of resistance, try surrender. How might your life be different if you could honestly trust in the reality of a God who is utterly reliable? This is the Lenten journey that leads us directly through the valley of the shadow of death to the wonder and rescue of Easter morning. A journey that begins by finding the courage to trust. Amen.