

Trust in the Lord

Scripture

Proverbs 3:5-6

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.

Taken from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) of the Bible.

Sermon

This has been a tough week for many people on many different levels. People have been shocked. People are angry and upset. People are sad and hurting. People are disappointed on many different levels. People are concerned. People are worried. People's lives have been disrupted on so many different levels. There are some who do not know what to do or believe. Some I am sure are questioning "Why?" Because of all this, I decided to break from my sermon series on Acts for one week and preach on something to address as best I can some of these questions we might have.

The reality is, if you have not realized it, we live in a broken world. We live in an imperfect world that includes forces opposed to God's original design, and not everything works out the way we wish it would. Loss, grief, disappointment, fear, alienation, hatred, insecurity, poverty of resources and of spirit, discrimination and violence tear painfully and tragically at the fabric of our common lives. Not one of us can escape the wrenching blows that are part of human life.

And the Bible is not oblivious to this. What we discover as we read through its pages is that we live in between the first two chapters in Genesis and the last two chapters of Revelation. The first two chapters of Genesis describe the beauty and perfection of God's creation in which He says everything is "Good." The last two chapters of Revelation describe the restoration of God's beauty and perfection to His creation. For now, we live between those two periods. The apostle Paul points to this fact in his letter to the Romans. In it he says "for the creation was subjected to futility" (8:20).

When sin entered this world through Adam and Eve's transgression in the Garden of Eden, everything changed. It has had a negative impact on our human lives. It has had a negative impact on God's beautiful creation. Original sin not only affected the human race, but also the environment of the planet we were given stewardship over. While this world contains many joys and surprises, there is a level of frustration that envelops it. We watch and see illnesses, natural disasters, droughts, etc. that plague our planet and our lives. We constantly see people who make bad decisions that hurt others. We see untimely deaths and gross injustice. This is all a result of man's sin that plunged all of creation into a fallen state.

No one, and I mean no one, is immune from any of this. Because of sin in this world, because of the free will God has given us, we all will make and be affected by living in this between period. Bad things will happen to good people. People we may not even know will make decisions that affect us. Every one of us in here today, every person in our nation, every person who has been on, is currently on and who will walk the face of this earth will be tempted from time to time to do something we know is wrong and goes against God's will. We will make decisions and do things we will regret. We could choose to break one of the 10 Commandments. We could choose to treat someone poorly because of their race or gender or just who they are. We could choose to lie about something. We could choose to steal from someone. We could choose to act violently against someone. We could choose to gossip about someone. Whatever it is, not one of us is excluded. Even the son God was tempted while he was on this earth, but through the power of the Holy Spirit, he was the only one who did not sin. He was able to avoid acting on those temptations because he always looked to his Heavenly Father and put his trust in Him.

And when someone makes bad decisions there may or may not be consequences. Sometimes there is not a single consequence on this side of the grave for bad decisions people make. Occasionally there are some people who think they can make bad decisions and escape the consequences of those decisions, expecting someone to rescue them from their bad choices. But many times, people do face consequences for the decisions they make.

These consequences can have many different outcomes. Sometimes peoples' decisions do not affect other people, but many times they do. Sometimes the consequences end up being minor infractions, like hurt feelings or bumps and bruises. But sometimes even small decisions can change peoples' lives forever: like lives being upturned and ripped apart, loss of life, nations going to war, people thrown in jail.

Examples of this abound in the Bible. Moses could not enter the Promise Land because he "broke faith with [God] among the Israelites...by failing to maintain [His] holiness among the Israelites" (Deuteronomy 32:51). Achan son of Carmi son of Zabdi son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, "took some of the devoted things" and Israelites died because "the anger of the LORD burned against the Israelites" (Joshua 7:1). David, a "man after God's own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14), was not allowed to build the Temple because he had "shed so much blood in [God's] sight on the earth" (1 Chronicles 22:8). Ananias and Sapphires lied to the church after selling a piece of property and giving part of the funds to the church while making it look like they gave everything, and they died at the Apostles' feet amidst their deception (Acts 5). Those are just some of the examples we can find between the first two chapters and the last two chapters.

Most of the time we can see there are usually consequences to people bad decisions. Someone goes to a bar and gets into an argument with someone after consuming too many drinks, resulting in a fight where someone is seriously injured. A factory worker comes in late to work almost every day and eventually gets fired from her job. A teenager chooses to spend time on his favorite video game, rather than studying for a big test and he ends up getting an F on the test. A mother chooses to smoke or drink or do drugs while being pregnant, and the baby is born with birth defects. A person chooses to steal something from a store that they cannot pay for themselves, and money is taken from the store owner's own money to cover the cost.

The difficult part for us is when consequences affect people who had nothing to do with the decisions that were made. This unfortunately happens to people all the time. Unfortunately, I have seen this happen more than once in the short time I have been in ministry. My guess is, every one of us has seen or experienced this in our lifetime.

When bad things happen to those who don't deserve it, when people fall to the temptations before them, when consequences are realized, we may ask many questions. We may want to know why things happened the way they did or what happened.

The struggle for us is we live in a time where we think we have the right know everything about everything. And the truth is, you can just about get an answer to any question you have on the internet these days. The answers you find may be false or completely biased, but it might look credible. Many people feel like we should know exactly what our celebrities or our heroes do. We feel like we should know everything behind why certain decisions are made. We feel like we should know why something happened the way it did. We may question why an organization

or a government is keeping silent on something. There is a whole multi-billion dollar industry out there that feeds this desire in our society. People dig into peoples' lives. People follow other people around just waiting to take that perfect incriminating picture. But do we really need to know everything? No! There are many things we should not know everything about the situation and sometimes it is in our best interest.

I think the Bible tells us we do not need to know everything. Jesus told us we are not to know when "Heaven and earth will pass away" (Matthew 24:35). He said "about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (24:36). Our scripture today tells us to "not rely on [our] own insight" which should show us that it is insane to trust such pitifully limited understanding we may have when we can trust the unlimited understanding of God.

But how do we get through these challenging times in our lives when they do arise? How do we need to respond when we do make a mistake and there are consequences? The key to surviving any challenge or crisis is hope. We need to have hope that Jesus loves us. We should have hope that God is, right now, working out a solution for us. We should have hope that the future we place in His hands will be better than the present we hold in our own. "I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope" (Jeremiah 29:11).

There is hope that things will once again be perfect. The Bible points to that fact. It tells us at some point we will reach those last two chapters in the Book of Revelation, which explains the beauty and perfection will be restored in God's Creation once again

So what do we, who are here today, need to do? What do we do while we are still in that "between" period?

What I know is that we need to be in prayer. Prayer changes things. Paul tells us "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (Philippians 4:6). We need to try our best to follow his advice and find ways to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

We especially need to pray for people whose lives have been uprooted, tossed into turmoil. We need to pray for those who are experiencing loss beyond measure. We need to pray for those whose hopes and dreams have been changed. We need to pray for the people who are upset and are experiencing anger and betrayal. We need to pray for those who are heartbroken. We need to pray for those whose faiths are and will be tested. Pray for them all, that their faiths will remain strong and that they will have hope in God. I cannot tell you how many times I have had people say they have felt peoples' prayers for them when they were struggling and that knowledge has helped them through those times in their lives.

We need to pray for our church; pray for the Church universal. If you do not realize it, God's church is still very much under attack from Satan. Satan has not backed down. He wants to destroy the Church and our faith in God, and we are not immune even in these walls. He is constantly attacking our faiths. We need protection and the only one who can provide that is God.

Pray for me. Pray for other pastors. Pray for all the leaders of the church. Pray that God gives us the strength to do what we are called to do and to say the things He wants us to say, that we can fight the temptations that come our way, and that we have the courage and strength to fulfill our callings wherever God may send us.

But above all, we need to do what our scripture from Proverbs says today. “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.” We need to focus on God and look to the Holy Spirit to guide us down the path where God wants us to go to.

Adam and Eve tried to lean on their own insight, and look what that did for them and us. But God does not want us to be miserable, even in this fallen, futility-infected evil age. He wants to relieve our anxiety. He wants to relieve our fear. He wants to relieve our doubt. And He can do that if we put our trust in Him. So, let us choose joy today by not leaning on our own insight, our own understanding, but on the sweet, childlike trust on the sure foundation of our loving Creator.

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