

Acts of Trust

25th Sunday after Pentecost, Nov. 15, 2015

Gospel Text: Mark 13:1-8

Pastor Pete Christ

There was a lot in the news this week. Which headlines caught your attention?

[Mizzou Students Protest: President Resigns]

Was it the news out of Missouri and how the university's president was under fire from the students and the football team over his lack of concern for recent racially-motivated incidents?

[Time for GOP Panic? Establishment Worried Carson or Trump Might Win]

Maybe it was all the hubbub surrounding last Tuesday's debate among the candidates vying for the Republican presidential nomination. Who had the best ideas? Who seemed most presidential? Who won? Who lost?

[Julia Roberts Steps Out in Leather Pants]

Perhaps this earth-shattering news from within the world of fashion really grabbed ahold of your consciousness. Now I'm going to have to re-think my whole fall wardrobe.

[Starbucks Cup Brews Controversy]

Certainly, the start of this year's 'War on Christmas' was big news in my Facebook feed.

[Pastor Reveals When World Will End]

And perhaps this headline stood out for you this week. Perhaps this is even why you're here today. Anxious to find out what secrets I've unlocked, what special knowledge I've been granted, what keen insight I've ascertained.

It seems that a fascination with the end is not something unique to 21st century pastors and parishioners in New Brighton. The disciples in 1st century Jerusalem were pretty curious about the end as well. We've been reading along throughout Mark's story for a whole year now, starting last year in Advent, just before Christmas. The lectionary bounces around a bit chronologically but by now in our readings we've covered the ins and outs of Mark's take on the good news of Jesus Christ. One of the keys to understanding this story is to take note of Jesus' very first announcement at the start of his ministry, "The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news." (Mk 1:15)

“The kingdom of God has come near.” This is what Mark’s gospel, the ‘good news’ he wants us to believe, is going to help us experience. Jesus calls his disciples and together we follow Jesus into his ministry of teaching, healing, serving and loving. Along the way, we’re shown all the ways in which the ‘kingdom of God’ isn’t any particular *place* to live but rather a particular way to live. Yet, the disciples spend much of the story just not grasping these particular distinctions.

Mark doesn’t really give us much detail on the backstory of the disciples prior to dropping their fishing nets and following Jesus. I would imagine that much of their lives were spent in and around small town Galilee and visits to Jerusalem and the temple were quite rare. The temple in Jerusalem was no doubt the largest and most impressive building in the city. Its walls and columns were certainly bigger than any other structure the disciples had ever seen. If kingdoms are identified by the castle homes of their kings, then in the eyes of the disciples the temple had to be the mark of the kingdom of God.

Yet in today’s reading, Jesus responds to the disciple’s amazed impressions of the grandeur of the temple stones suggesting that in spite of their size, they will crumble and fall, the temple will be destroyed. Such news had to be more than a little surprising for the disciples to hear. In their minds, the destruction of the temple could only signify the end of the kingdom of God. And if the kingdom were to end, what would that mean for them?

So they ask Jesus, “when will this happen?” and “will we have any warning?” Jesus goes on to suggest that there will be signs that the end is coming and that they should be prepared but he never clues them in to exactly when. Today’s lectionary reading cuts short Jesus’ full advice to his anxious followers but it’s important to note that at the end of his discourse, at the end of this 13th chapter of Mark, Jesus encourages his disciples to “Keep awake.” Jesus wants his followers to care about *this moment* right now and to not worry about some moment yet to come. Stay focused on what’s right in front of you and **trust** that God will take care of the rest.

Trust is a tricky thing. Jesus wants the disciples to forget about the eventual destruction of the biggest building in the biggest city in their world. Jesus wants the disciples to trust that God’s plan doesn’t change even if and when the world comes to an end. Because we can trust in God, Jesus wants us to pay attention to the here and now.

You have been clothed with compassion Christ the King and it's with **acts of trust** that you're empowered to care for God's kingdom. Today, I want to unpack why **trust** is such an important part of this kingdom-caring equation.

There are three big takeaways I hope you're left with today and should help guide your understanding of how **trust** plays into the bigger picture of responding to God's love.

First, **trust means having a capacity for uncertainty**. Our human stories are filled with the unknown. It exists all around us yet somehow we function and move through our days. We can be fairly sure of ourselves: our likes, our dislikes, how we will act in certain settings, and how we will react when confronted in particular ways. But we don't know everything do we. In fact, we know surprisingly little about the world around us.

For all Benjamin Franklin knew about his world at the time, he was famous for being certain about very little. ["In this world nothing is certain except death and taxes."] Imagine if we only acted in times when we were certain of the outcomes. What would we ever do? Would we open a savings account or invest in the stock market? Would we go on a blind date or even get married? Would we get behind the steering wheel of a car or on an airplane? All of these efforts require an act of trust, they require having a capacity for uncertainty. If you're anything like me, you're always weighing the risk and reward of any particular situation. I think that's only human nature. Partly, it's rooted in how well we understand our own selves and partly how little we know about our neighbor.

Just two weeks ago, Jama Asma sat enjoying dinner with her friends and family at an Applebee's right next door in Coon Rapids. A short time later, she was riding in an ambulance, headed to the hospital, bleeding from her split lower lip.

"It's going to take me a while to get back to trusting people again." She said in an interview after the incident. While Jama had been enjoying a meal and conversation with her friends, a neighboring customer confronted them and complained about their not speaking in English here in America. Jama replied that though she had lived here for 15 years and could speak English just fine, they preferred to speak with each other in their native Swahili. Then the neighboring customer threw her beer mug across Jama's face. Jama went to the hospital. The other customer went to jail.

When trust isn't present, the world just stops working the way God created it to be. How do we go out to a restaurant if we can't trust we'll be safe from harm? It's hard to drive to the store, or school or work if we can't trust that the traffic signals are functioning properly. Banks that don't protect the assets entrusted to them fail. Marriages without trust fall apart.

So we take a leap of faith. We open ourselves up and acknowledge the uncertainty that is embedded in every situation and circumstance. And we move forward. Sometimes, having a great capacity for uncertainty can get us into trouble, like it does for Charlie Brown. But that kind of tolerance for risk is exactly what's going to change the world some day. Trust requires a capacity for uncertainty.

Trust also demands patience. If we can get over the hurdle of living with uncertainty, then it becomes a question of "how long?" That was the challenge before the disciples in today's reading. *You say these things will happen Jesus, but when can we expect them to occur?* I believe it was a famous philosopher that put to words this very truth: The waiting is the hardest part. [Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers]

Though it's difficult, there's a refining quality about waiting that helps to sharpen our senses. As time goes by, we have an opportunity to clarify our expectations of what is to come. I'm proud to say that Anne and I have been together for just over 26 years, married for 22 of them. Most of the first few years of our relationship were spent apart while I was finishing school in New York and Anne was living in Minnesota and Montana. Others wondered how a relationship could survive during such separation. We half-jokingly would say, "I just trust him" or "I just trust her." I'm not going to lie. It was still hard. I also think the hard-won patience we found helped us to focus on that which was truly important in our relationship. We learned that yes, physical presence matters, but so do communication, encouragement, and vocation. Recently, we found ourselves living apart again and wondering when the end of the separation would come. We trusted that it would, we trusted in each other, found the patience and rediscovered the core strengths of our relationship remain. Though it's hard, trust demands patience.

Finally, **trust is relational.** We aren't alone in this world. In fact, all of our lives are lived in relationship. Hopefully, this is not a big surprise to you. From the beginning, we have lived in relationship. Consider the creation story, everything is in relationship. Light and darkness, sea and sky, land and animals, Adam and Eve. It's all relational. And it was all good.

In the garden, God entrusts humanity with great responsibility and we become stewards of each of these life-giving relationships. But you know the story, God also trusted us not to eat the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good & Evil. To do so would be an attempt to be like God. Well of course we screwed that one up, big time. And in doing so, brought mistrust into each and every relationship we were responsible for. This is part of where our brokenness comes from; when we're incapable of trusting we screw up the relationships that matter most, the relationships that give us life.

For those of you reading *We Make the Road by Walking* by Brian McLaren you'll recognize this axiom, but for the rest of us, consider that the creation story delivers two essential truths: we are good, we are all bear God's image. As such, we are entrusted with great responsibility. But when we break the trust, when we eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, just look at the poor results. When our relationships are devoid of trust, the goodness fades away.

This past Wednesday evening, we hosted a conversation right here in the sanctuary at Christ the King. This was billed as an opportunity to listen deeply to our neighbors and the panel of guests represented a number of constituencies in this community. There were plenty of 'ah ha' moments during the conversation but there was one that immediately struck out at me. Dean Lotter, New Brighton's City Manager, was responding to a question concerning what were the biggest challenges he faces in his role with the city. He responded, saying that a lack of civility is one of the greatest threats to public discourse right now. Considering how to move beyond what, I would argue, is a lack of trust in the public arena, listen to what Dean had to say in response.

[Video: Dean Lotter, New Brighton City Manager]

"We need to learn how to engage each other with love and compassion, even when we vehemently disagree with each other."

I'm sure you will agree that a lack of trust is central to the political gridlock experienced at the federal, state and even local level. Where has the trust gone? How can our political systems be repaired? What role does the faith community have in all of this? These are important questions to be asking. Fortunately, this community of faith has something to contribute to this conversation. Remember, trust is relational. And as a result, trust builds community.

In the section of the letter to the Hebrews that we read earlier, the author was keenly aware of this fact. "Let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds... encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day approaching." [Hebrews 10:24-25]

We need to be encouraged by each other in these acts of trust. There will always be times when we falter. That's when we should be able to rely on the rest of the community to push us along once more. In community, we are made stronger. In community, we are able to trust more deeply. In community, the kingdom of God comes near.

So let's consider how this church is a model for trust in this community:

When we open our doors for this community's young people in partnership with CPY, we model trust.

When we stock the shelves of our food pantry so that we can help in times of need, we model trust.

When we check on our shut-in neighbors, we model trust.

When we accept that language and clothing don't define humanity, we model trust.

When we celebrate diversity, we model trust.

When we listen deeply, without judging, we model trust.

When we ask for forgiveness, we model trust.

When we offer forgiveness, we model trust.

When we love unconditionally, we model trust.

Remember, trust is having a capacity for uncertainty, trust demands patience and trust is relational. Acts of trust are dynamic mechanisms that bring closer the kingdom of God. To be clothed in compassion, Christ the King, means to live into these acts of trust, live with uncertainty, become refined in patience, be drawn into relationship. In these acts of trust, bring the kingdom of God near.

There was one more headline this week that I'm guessing caught your attention. [Paris Attacks Leave Many Dead] The senseless and violent attacks that happened in Paris on Friday have once again demonstrated how much is broken in this world. And in Beirut, Lebanon, suicide bombers took the lives of another 43 and injured over 200 other innocents. And to the list we add Iraq and Palestine and Japan and Mexico and on and on. We mourn with those who lost friends and family in all this violence. We pray for those who were injured. We grieve along with all of humanity and we long for the return of trust in our world.

There is a God who weeps with us. There is a God who loves us in spite of all we do to make matters worse. There is a God that longs to make this world whole again.

When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs. [Mk 13:7-8]

Remember, the God we call upon in times such as these possesses an unlimited capacity for uncertainty. The God we call upon has been and will continue to be patient. The God we call upon longs for nothing more than to be in relationship with us. May the God who trusts, move us to act in kind.

Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy.

Amen.