



WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

August 16, 2020

Back to the Basics: Trust

Dr. Bruce Lancaster

Back to the Basics: Trust

Dr. Bruce Lancaster

© 2020 by Dr. Bruce Lancaster and Westminster Presbyterian Church.

All rights reserved.

No part of this sermon may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the author.

Printed in the United States of America

First Printing: August 17, 2020

Numbers 14:6-12

Psalm 95

Today and the next two Sundays, I want to think about some of the basics for our life as Christians: Trust, Forgiveness, and Redemption.

We will be guided by a Psalm each Sunday with a story from the Old Testament to give us a picture of these basics for our faith.

We begin with Psalm 95, and as you listened to this psalm, there's such a strong resemblance to so many other psalms: sing to the Lord, come into his presence with thanksgiving, make a joyful noise, worship and bow down, we are the people of his pasture, the sheep of his hand.

We can be forgiven if we claim the "stop me if you've heard this before" justification for not going all the way to the end.

And some readings for devotions or prayers do this; they end with verse 7 and leave verses 8 through 11 out in the cold of biblical never-read.

Some scholars believe these were two separate psalms that were fused with the phrase between verse 7 and verse 8 that says, "O that today you would listen to his voice!"

If someone did choose to join these two fragments of psalms, why? One is so happy, filled with the joy of worship, and those last verses seem to be so wrathful?

What on earth do verses 1 – 7 and 8 – 11 have in common?

Verses 1-7, joyful praise on the lips of the congregation, but then suddenly, verses 8-11, it is God who is speaking! And not applicable of anything that verses 1-7 were about, either.

These last verses include a little history lesson when God speaks about those forty years in the wilderness.

That's our passage from Numbers. God was wanting to install the people of Israel in the Promised Land; makes me think Moses was a Presbyterian, he formed a committee.

And in good Presbyterian fashion, they came back with a split report.

The majority report was to the point: "We can't take the land...we can't go in there! We saw the people there...they're giants; we felt like grasshoppers next to them!"

The minority report: "Let's go, let's go possess the land right now! God has given it us!"

The majority won. They didn't go. In software installation terms when it came time to click 'finish and restart; they clicked 'cancel'.

Instead of being installed in the Promised Land as children of God, God took them back into the wilderness for 40 years, for that generation to pass away before they were brought back to the Promised Land.

That's the force of God's words in this psalm, "*For forty years I loathed that generation...in my anger I swore they shall not enter my rest...*"

What it seems to me that these two parts of Psalm 95 have in common, why it's important to read this psalm all the way through to the end; both parts are about trust.

Trusting in God, those first seven verses of being in the presence of God, of who God is, and what it means for how we live, and then those last three verses about when we betray God's trust in us.

The Ten had a choice to make, their faith gave way to fears and the Israelites wandered in the wilderness until that generation died out.

I like the way someone put it: "They died on the horns of their hesitation."

I think what was happening to those ten was the same thing that happens to us: anxiety is the enemy of trust.

When we feel anxious, we look for someone to blame, some thing or person on which to place our fears, our anxieties! They're giants, we're grasshoppers!

When we are anxious, we live with a sense of conspiracy all around us; we don't listen to others, we attribute the worst of motives to those who disagree with us, who are different. Trust comes harder in challenging times, trusting people, trusting God.

When we betray trust, we are tempted, constantly and in various ways, to define our own ways and dedicate ourselves to purposes that are self-serving and self-righteous, unable and unwilling to claim tomorrow as the children of God.

The force of these two parts of Psalm 95 directs us to a choice about our future: We must decide whether to trust God to be trustworthy.

The great theologian Jürgen Moltmann said it this way, “Whenever we base our hope on trust in the divine mystery, we feel deep down in our hearts: there is someone who is waiting for you, who is hoping for you, who believes in you...God is our last hope because we are God's first love.”

Do you hear that bridge verse between trusting and not trusting: “O that today you would listen to his voice!”

The challenge today is not to know with complete certainty what lies ahead; the heart of living turns on whether you and I trust God.

It's not just a matter of saying “In God we trust” but how we trust God to live:

- The issue is not what kind of job we have, but what kind of living are we doing?
- The issue is not what kind of investments we own, but what have we invested in that will make life more pleasing to God?
- The issue is not living on my own terms, but on how I live on the terms God sets for how we are responsible for the least of these among us: how we treat the poor, how we treat people who cannot protect themselves, how we treat those who mistreat us, how we face trouble, sickness, discouragement, success and failure, triumphs and tragedies.

The Christian faith is both that simple and that complicated: To trust that God is at work in this world, all around us, all the time, in every moment, every minute, every nook and cranny of life.

And through this trust, to believe that God loves us and pursues us with a passion, and invites us, gives us the opportunity, to share in his work.

God doesn't simply suggest that we invent some good things to do, but, rather, since God is at work before us, he says, "Come and join me. I want to empower you to do my will within the world as my covenant people, not just every now and then but to have the mind of a servant, and when you get it, you will find that I will be working in and through your lives in all kinds of ways."

He calls us to be servants, not to make us bow and scrape or cringe in fear, not to make us less than we are, but because, paradoxically, it is when we see ourselves as servants of the living God that we will find our greatest purpose, our greatest dignity and our greatest joy.

What power is unleashed when we come to grips with that fact, face our anxieties and say, "Nevertheless, I will take a step forward with God despite the difficulties and the troubles and the problems because God is at work and God loves me with a passion and wants me to be a passionate, loving servant, and on that path I will find my greatest joy. It is worth the risk. I trust God!"

TO GOD BE THE GLORY.



WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

2040 Washington Road
Pittsburgh, PA 15241
412-835-6630
www.westminster-church.org