

“Trust”

John 20.19-31

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Mason First Presbyterian Church

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Easter II

It’s about *trust*. It’s all about *trust*.

Our gospel lesson this morning tells the story of a man named Thomas. A man named Thomas, who just couldn’t quite *trust* that the story he was hearing could possibly be true. His friends were telling him that they had seen their Teacher, their Master, their Lord, the risen Christ. That they had seen him with their own eyes. Thomas couldn’t quite trust their story. He found their story to be so incredible, so outlandish, so ridiculous, that he just couldn’t bring himself to *trust* that it could possibly be true. His friends were asking him to *believe* their story, to *have faith* in their story, to *place his trust* in their story . . . but Thomas found that he just couldn’t do that. He couldn’t believe, he couldn’t have faith, he couldn’t place his trust in their story, not on the basis of just *hearing* it. For Thomas, *hearing* the story wasn’t sufficient. He needed to *experience* it.

Sometimes, it’s hard to believe, it’s hard to have faith, it’s hard to place our trust in something, or in someone. Sometimes, what we hear with our ears sounds so incredible, so outlandish, so ridiculous, that it’s hard for us to bring ourselves to *trust* that it could possibly be true. Sometimes, in order to believe in something, to have faith in something, to place our trust in something – or in someone – we just have to *experience* it. Sometimes, it’s only by *experiencing* something, or someone, that we come to believe that something or someone is really *worthy* of our trust.

Thomas needed to know if the story he was hearing was really *worthy* of his trust. No matter how much talking his friends did, their words alone were not sufficient. In order to *believe* their story, in order to *have faith* in their story, in order to *trust* their story about how they had seen their Teacher, their Master, their Lord, the risen Christ, Thomas had to *experience* it.

It’s about *trust*. It’s all about *trust*. Our gospel lesson this morning is all about *trust*. In fact, the whole Christian faith, at its core, is all about *trust*.

When I visited this church for the very first time, three things immediately grabbed my attention: first was the beautiful stonework, and then there were those magnificent windows. I suspect those two things immediately grab many people’s attention. But, for me, there was a third thing that immediately grabbed my attention: that set of nine banners hanging along the rear wall of this

sanctuary. A casual visitor might not know the significance of those banners, but I recognized them immediately. Those banners represent nine different occasions, over the course of the past two thousand years, in which the church has stood up to tell the world about the God in whom we trust. Each one of those banners corresponds to one of the historic confessions of faith in our particular branch of the Christian tradition: two confessions from the ancient church (the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed); four confessions from the Protestant Reformation; and three confessions from the past century, the most recent of which is only a quarter of a century old. Those banners represent nine different particular moments in the course of our history when we have stood up to declare to the world, "This is what we believe." "This is our faith." "This is what we know about the God in whom we trust."

At its core, the Christian faith is about trust. Trust in a living God. Trust in a Lord whom we call Jesus Christ. Trust in this elusive thing we call the Holy Spirit. Every single one of those nine confessions bears witness to the living God, and to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to the Holy Spirit. When I finish this sermon, we are going to recite one of those confessions together. "I believe in God the Father Almighty . . . I believe in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord . . . I believe in the Holy Ghost." You all do this week after week after week. Every time you do, you are proclaiming to the world, "This is what we believe." "This is our faith." "This is what we know about the God in whom we trust."

And you make that declaration of your faith, week after week after week, through all the trials and tribulations that life brings. You get the biopsy results back, and they aren't what you wanted to hear . . . yet you come here on Sunday and affirm your trust in God. The person you thought was the love of your life turns on you and hurts you in ways you never imagined you could be hurt . . . yet you come here on Sunday and affirm your trust in God. You get that phone call telling you something about your child that you wish weren't true but know that it surely is . . . yet you come here on Sunday and affirm your trust in God. You learn that you've been laid off, or that your position has been eliminated . . . yet you come here on Sunday and affirm your trust in God. The markets go down and grocery costs go up and utility bills seem like they're flying through the roof and you wonder how you're going to make ends meet . . . yet you come here on Sunday and affirm your trust in God. You drench your pillow with tears night after night . . . yet you come here on Sunday and affirm your trust in God. You stand at the graveside and hear those words, "ashes to ashes, dust to dust" . . . some of you did that just within the past week . . . yet you come here on Sunday and affirm your trust in God. You affirm your trust in God – we affirm our trust in God – even in the midst of all the trials and tribulations that life brings.

At its core, the Christian faith is about trust. Trust in God. Trust in Jesus Christ. Trust in the Holy Spirit. Trust that, no matter what might be going on in our personal lives, or in the life of this world, there is a God in whom we can place our trust. There is a Lord who is worthy of our trust. There is a Holy Spirit who nourishes us and sustains us even in those moments when our trust might be put to the ultimate test. At its core, the Christian faith is all about trust.

But sometimes, for some of us, it can be hard to place our trust in God. Sometimes, there are moments when we feel like Thomas. Sometimes, people are telling us stories about this God whom we know in Jesus Christ, and we *want* to believe them, we *need* to believe them, but, because of whatever may be going on in our lives at that particular moment, *hearing* the stories isn't enough. Sometimes, no

matter how much we might *want* to believe, no matter how much we might *want* to have faith, no matter how much we might *want* to place our trust in this living God, sometimes, because of what's going on in our lives at that particular moment, we just can't quite do it. We hear the stories from our friends, but sometimes, that's just not sufficient. Sometimes, in order to really *trust* in God, we have to *experience* God.

Which is one of the reasons why the church is important. We tell the stories, like the story you heard a few minutes ago. We confess our faith, like we will be doing a few minutes from now. But we also provide people means by which they can *experience* God. Sometimes hearing the stories isn't enough to help us to *trust* in God. Sometimes confessing the faith isn't enough to help us *trust* in God. Sometimes, in order to trust in God, *really* trust in God, we have to *experience* God. And the church can provide some of those experiences.

Now you and I both know that the church is an incredibly *human* institution. The church is not perfect. There are so many times when we fall short of all that God is calling us to be. Sometimes people take us to task for that. Sometimes they have good reason to; there have been all sorts of things that have been done in the name of the church over the course of the past two thousand years that surely don't bear witness to the God in whom we place our trust. But you and I both know that that's not the whole story. The church, when it is at its best, when it is doing the work that God has called it to do, when it is living up to the potential that exists within us, stands as a witness to the God in whom we place our trust. When the church goes about the business of doing good ministry, *really* good ministry, extending the love of God to the world in the name of Jesus Christ, being the hands and feet of Jesus in the world around us - well, that's an experience. It's an experience that just might inspire someone to have faith in God. It's an experience that just might turn a *doubting* Thomas back into a *trusting* Thomas.

The Christian faith, at its core, is about *trust*. Trust in God. Trust in Jesus Christ. Trust in the Holy Spirit. Trust that, no matter what might be going on in our personal lives, or in the life of this world, there is a God in whom we can place our trust. There is a Lord who is worthy of our trust. There is a Holy Spirit who is worthy of our trust. And there is a *church* that can help inspire people to have that kind of *trust* in God, and in Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Spirit.

Churches need leaders. Churches need *good* leaders. In order to keep focused on the business of doing good ministry, *really* good ministry, extending the love of God to the world in the name of Jesus Christ, being the hands and feet of Jesus in the world around us, providing people with an experience of God that just might inspire someone to have faith in God - well, churches need good leaders. Churches need good staff members; churches need good deacons; churches need good elders; churches need good pastors. In our tradition, in the Presbyterian tradition, local congregations have the power to *elect* their leaders.

In another twenty minutes or so, you will be participating in an important meeting, and you will be asked to cast a vote. It's a vote in which you have a significant role to play. You get to help decide the future history of this church. It's an important vote. (I would say that even if *I* weren't the one being voted upon!) It's a vote that has to do with matters of *trust*. You will be asked to place your trust in the recommendation that your Pastor Nominating Committee is making. You will be asked to place your trust in a human being. An *imperfect* human being. A *fallible* human being. A human being who makes

his fair share of mistakes. I've been talking here this morning about trust in God, trust in Jesus Christ, and trust in the Holy Spirit, and it's important that you know that the person whom your Pastor Nominating Committee is nominating to become your next pastor is *not worthy* of that kind of trust. The candidate whom the PNC is nominating happens to be quite *human!* And yet, the PNC is asking you to place your trust in its recommendation. Your PNC is asking you to place your trust in this imperfect, fallible human being who makes his fair share of mistakes. He is not God! He does not walk on water. He cannot feed five thousand people with five barley loaves and two fishes. He is not able to cure people of their diseases. He does not have the power to cast out demons. He has never yet raised anyone from the dead. He can't even be in three places at the same time. Heck, he can't even be in *two* places at the same time! He is an imperfect, fallible human being, who makes his fair share of mistakes. Maybe he has some strengths. But he also has some weaknesses. He has some foibles and some fears. He has some limitations. He doesn't always make the best decisions. He gets tired sometimes. Sometimes, he's even been known to get a little cranky, and if you don't believe that, well, ask his wife! In other words – *he is human!* He's trying to be the best possible human he can possibly be, but he knows that's not always easy, and sometimes he slips. He's trying to follow Jesus as best as he can, but he knows how often he misses the mark. He's an imperfect, fallible human being, who happens to make his fair share of mistakes. It's important that you know all this stuff *before* you cast your vote. If you're looking for Jesus – well, you'd better call someone else!

It's also important that you know this. If you call me to become your next pastor, I will *work* to *earn* your *trust*. I may not be worthy of the kind of trust that you place in God, and in Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Spirit, and I may be an imperfect, fallible human being who makes his fair share of mistakes, but I will also *work* to *earn* your *trust*. And, furthermore, I will work to help inspire your trust in God, and in Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Spirit. Because, ultimately, the Christian faith isn't about whether you trust in *humans*. Those banners that line the back wall of the sanctuary of this church aren't about trust in *humans*. They're about trust in God, and in Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Spirit.

If you call me to become your next Pastor, my primary goal will be *to serve as your Pastor with integrity, courage, and self-discipline in all my words and deeds in a way that embodies the rich heritage of our Reformed tradition, the just nature of our Presbyterian form of government, and an ever-present openness to the ongoing movement of the Holy Spirit in our lives and in the life of this world, so that I might be instrumental to you in your spiritual journey as you seek to grow in your faith in God, in your commitment to the church, and in your service to the world in the name of Jesus Christ.*

It's about trust. It's all about trust. The Christian faith, at its core, is all about trust. Trust in God. Trust in Jesus Christ. Trust in the Holy Spirit. Trust that, no matter what might be going on in our personal lives, or in the life of this world, there is a God in whom we can place our trust. There is a Lord who is worthy of our trust. There is a Holy Spirit who is worthy of our trust. There is a *church* that can help inspire people to have that kind of *trust* in God, in Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Spirit. And there are *pastors* who see it as their mission, their vocation, their calling, to help people grow in their trust in God, in Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Spirit. If it is *your* will . . . and if it is *God's* will . . . I will be that kind of pastor for this congregation.

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