

Stay on the Path of Trust—9th Sunday after Pentecost

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[Genesis 15:1-6](#)

[Psalm 33:12-22](#)

[Hebrews 11:1-3; 8-16](#)

[Luke 12:32-40](#)

Sermon delivered at Christ the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Hamden, CT

Today's lessons open to us another battle in the age-old and ongoing struggle between trusting God's word and trusting our own common sense. In each of our readings these contrasting worldviews play out dramatically.

We hear about Abram—Abraham, same guy—in both Genesis in the Old Testament and in the letter to the Hebrews in the New. Abraham is defined by a promise and a command. He is commanded to go away from his home and wander. He is promised by God to be the ancestor of many—of all God's people. Abraham is faithful, but not a complete idiot. And at a certain point he and Sarah, his wife, are getting rather old. She's past menopause I would suppose. And Abraham says to God, "Hey, hurry up. Or else my right-hand man here, Eliezer of Damascus, is going to inherit my estate, and not my own child, as you promised."

Common sense dictates Abe having a son is impossible. Common sense says: line up an heir so you don't lose your stuff! God, of course, renews his promise to Abraham. God's word says: Don't settle. Stay on the path of trust.

But staying on the path of trust is tough. In the history of the people of Israel it got very tough. Huge, ancient empires like the Assyrians and the Babylonians came along, with better weapons and huge armies and big temples full of flashy, powerful gods built for war. The people had common sense. They said, "Quick! Give us a king, and armies and horses and chariots!"

But the prophets of God had the uncomfortable job of reminding the people about the path of trust. Here is such a reminder from the Psalms today:

A king is not saved by the size of the army,
nor are warriors rescued by their great strength.
The horse gives vain hope for victory;
despite its great strength it cannot save.
Truly, your eye is upon those who fear you, O Lord,

upon those who wait for your steadfast love,
to deliver their lives from death,
and to keep them alive in time of famine.

God says through the Psalmist: Sure, common sense is fine, until it's not. *Don't settle*. Strength, size, speed—are all in vain because they wear out. God's love, however, does not.

But, of course, it's a matter of trust vs. common sense. What good does God's love do the people of Ukraine? I'm sure they want to see armies, and guns and jets and tanks. We would too. But, the path of trust goes, at times, down very dark roads.

The author of the letter to the Hebrews today says very much the same. The author was writing to the earliest followers of Jesus, before there was any real division like we know between Christian and Jewish. And he was using all the characters and people of God from the Old Testament, which was the only bible he had—no New Testament on the shelf yet—he used these familiar people of faith to tell the story of trusting God's word vs. trusting our own common sense. And he said it in a way that really packs a punch.

We call ourselves people of faith. Many of you had parents that were people of faith, and you are doing your best to carry on the torch. Others here found faith alone, called by God to a new way of life. However we got here, here we are. We, the faithful, the trustful, are actually called trust God! But that's scary!

The author of Hebrews writes: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Notice, it's not the other way around. Common sense says I see with my eyes a threat, I will fight it. Common sense says I understand things are not looking good, I will act accordingly. **Trust says what I see is not the first, nor the last.**

Hebrews says: "By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible." This means we trust that there is something—someone—else beyond and beneath all. Before all, and after all.

And that someone is speaking and talking and reaching out to us. Indeed, in Hebrews it says: "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going." That call, that thing called God's Word, that encounter that fills us with trust is always happening, always on going. That encounter is always near at hand, and—like Jesus says today in Luke—that encounter could happen at any moment. But Jesus also says: stop worrying, don't be afraid, don't settle: God wants all this to work out.

In Luke, Jesus uses metaphors of marriage and theft, a little confusing. But both marriage and theft are encounters, encounters usually in the evening. We are told to be ready, like the attendants at the honeymoon suite. But the honeymoon of God and the world, Jesus and the church. We are told to be ready to open the door. We are told to be ready, if you are ready for a thief to come in the night it isn't a surprise.

But be careful, Jesus says, make sure you trust God more than you trust your common sense. Common sense says keep your possessions! Jesus shows us a path of trust, where we know the well-being of our siblings who are struggling is more important.

Now, I'm sure you're thinking some version of: trust sounds cool, but common sense isn't *bad*... And especially the bit about possessions, that is not going to happen in my life. And I will say God does not want you to throw your common sense away, to be fools, wandering aimlessly, helping no one because we ourselves are helpless.

In Luke today Jesus says to be alert. And you might remember: in Matthew Jesus says, "be wise as serpents and innocent as doves." The point is to not rely on our own common sense only.

What does that mean for you? What does that mean for our community here? In many ways I believe our community is on the knife's edge of trust and common sense, all churches are.

The merger, the dying of Christ Lutheran and of the Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd to become one, was an act of trust—or was it? Was it the most logical, commonsense conclusion to make sure at least one Lutheran church in Hamden stayed open?

Or was it about trust? **Trusting the reality of God's promises?** Was the merger about trusting that before all worlds, and after all worlds there is only one thing: God's eternal love? Was it about trusting that this love has chosen to become visible to us in a human being, born in a real time and place, and whose unswerving fate was to be rejected and to die? Trusting that this fate, this death on the cross, is not a tragedy but was made holy and affirmed by Christ's Resurrection to new life? Trusting that this death was an image of God's totally selfless giving—a picture of creation?

I can testify that trust in these promises is here. The heart of who we are, here, is a terrifying trust. We don't know where we are going, just like Abraham—we don't know where our lives are going, or our nation or world! But we trust that we, and God's church however it will look, are held by God, and part of Christ.

You've always got to remember: the success or the failure of this merger, and the successes or failures of your own lives can't get in the way of these promises of God, of who God is. We are

the faithful, gathered here, in this time and place. We are the newest trusting ones, and our ancestor is Abraham. So, let us pray, as the Psalmist has written today:

Our innermost being waits for you, O Lord,
our helper and our shield.

Surely, our heart rejoices in you,
for in your holy name we put our trust.

Let your lovingkindness, O Lord, be upon us,
even as we place our hope in you.

Amen.