

What Does Trust Look Like?

Fellow bearers of the image of God – the imprint of Love, I invite us to wonder together this morning: What does trust look like? God’s love draws us together on this post-election Sunday morning - via livestream and in our house of worship on this land which Dakota peoples and others have loved for millennia before us and which we hope others will cherish into the future. As we move into this time of wondering, let’s first pause to pray. Holy Spirit, we long for heightened awareness of your loving, empowering presence with us. Teach us to lean into you as we also risk leaning toward one another. Fill our hearts and our minds with your peace as you reveal to us our next loving movements forward. Amen.

Fellow followers of Jesus, this election season has been heavy for many of us. The presidential campaigns and the results of that election have strained relationships in our lives. Division and siloed distrust have pervaded our entertainment, workplaces, mealtimes, and private thought. Many of us have invested hope and possibly other resources into the prospect of one or the other candidate winning. And now, we are tapped out!

Before seeking inspiration models of trust in today’s scripture readings and our own experiences, I first invite us to sit in the uncomfortable spaces where trust is not evident. In my journey with the concept and experience of trust this past week, I stumbled upon the distinction between mistrust and distrust. I think that mistrust causes us to begin to protectively separate ourselves from the other, while distrust keeps us separated from the other. **Mistrust** is suspicion or doubt without a concrete reason. **Distrust** is when evidence or experience cause the development of a definitive lack of trust.

Let's wonder together about what creates barriers where we might otherwise build trust. Let's give ourselves the grace to recognize that our bodies, minds and spirits exercise wisdom of self-compassion by sending us signals to protect ourselves from dangerously misplaced trust. And let's also give ourselves the grace to recognize that, sometimes, we lean into the way of fear, letting unfounded assumptions take hold of the posture of our bodies, minds and spirits such that we are poised for mistrust and distrust.

I wonder about times when it might be the other who seems to sow the seed of your mistrust or distrust. Let's reflect quietly on these two questions and then see what the Spirit moves us to share aloud in community (if anything). I invite you to close your eyes if it helps you to focus inwardly. First question: **What behaviors by others cause your hackles to go up with the vague suspicion or doubt of mistrust?** *[pause]* And a second question: **What behaviors by others, when repeated across time, cause you to set a protective boundary of distrust between you and them?** *[pause]*

Would anyone care, for the good of the community, to share a brief word or phrase of a behavior that you do know causes your hackles of mistrust to go up or that you set a protective boundary against?

[Bullying, belittling, being mean toward others. Someone who makes an assumption about me without knowing me or listening to me. Being selfish. A service personnel who deals with me while only looking at a screen and not at me. Someone constantly spinning only the negative stories of gloom and doom. Someone telling me what church I need to worship at.] Thank you for sharing this. And, again, we may have that vague hackles-up suspicion or we may sometimes need to set that protective boundary of distrust.

I invite us to challenge ourselves in coming days to stay alert to times when we lean into the way of fear, letting unfounded assumptions take hold of our body, mind and spirit such that we become ready hosts for mistrust and distrust.

Let's shift one hundred eighty degrees then to focus on trust. **To trust is to place confidence in or to rely on.** I will share from a personal experience and today's two narrative scripture readings to shed light on the path forward.

As I've shared in the past, before serving as a public school teacher and eventually pastoral ministry, my first professional vocation was in outdoor ministry. Within that context, I was trained in multiple settings to facilitate group building activities on ropes courses. In recent days, I've recalled an activity called the Wild Woosey. Two strong cables are anchored into a single tree trunk, approximately two feet off the ground. The opposite end of each cable is anchored into separate trees approximately 20 feet away, with perhaps 10 feet between them.

One aspect of the Wild Woosey relates directly to the kind of trust that Elijah and widowed woman model for us. Another aspect of the Wild Woosey relates to the example Jesus witnessed in another widowed woman. Participants engage in the Wild Woosey in pairs. Two people each step up onto the cable, hugging the same tree. Then, carefully, they each shift a hand to each other, palm against palm. And they start shuffling along their corresponding cables, letting go of the tree with the other hand and land that one also palm to palm. Slowly and carefully, eyes locked on one another, they keep their bodies straight and lean their full weight into each other's palms. They move out along the cables until footing eventually falters and they need to step off the Wild Woosey.

Today's reading from the book of 1 Kings provides a moving narrative from the journey of Elijah, a memorable prophet in our Jewish and Christian traditions. Elijah is often remembered for how the Word of God came through him to the people by way of powerful speech and action. Elijah was remembered as a great healer – a worker of miracles. In narratives of Jesus' life and ministry, people sometimes wondered if Jesus (so clearly and powerfully sent by their God) was actually Elijah returned from the dead to teach and lead them.

Amidst the supernatural features in today's readings (like Elijah hearing God's voice with crystal clarity and the miraculously self-replenishing jar of meal and jug of oil), I see how Elijah's and the woman's responses to their circumstances and to one another can relate quite directly to our lives today. They teach us something about urgency – and not an urgency propelled by fear, but rather urgency empowered by love.

These characters model audacity, risk-taking and trust. As we begin to examine their responses to their circumstances as well as our responses to our own circumstances today, I invite you to hear these lyrics from Indiana-based singer songwriter Carrie Newcomer's song, "If Not Now." She writes,

"If not now, tell me when?"

We may never see this moment or place in time again

If not now, if not now, tell me when?

I see sorrow and trouble in this land

Although there will be struggle, we'll make the change we can

If not now, if not now, tell me when?

We'll work it 'til it's done

Every daughter, every son

Every soul that ever longed for something better

Something brighter

*And it will take a change of heart for this to mend
But miracles do happen every shining now and then
If not now, if not now, tell me when?"*

Words of heart and wisdom from Carrie Newcomer.

A few moments leap off the pages of today's Older Testament story to me. *"Then the word of God came to Elijah and said, 'Now go to Zarephath, a village of Sidon, and stay there. I have commanded a widow there to supply you with food.'* So he went to Zarephath." God urged tired, hungry Elijah forward, because God had yet more work to do through Elijah. I wonder, to what is God calling you – now (not then)? And if you were to answer the call, where would you invest yourself with more audacity, risk-taking, and trust?

I was also struck by the moment in which Elijah boldly asks the woman to give him the last of the food in her house. Can you imagine yourself acting with such audacity!? Do you feel some indignation toward Elijah's words and behavior in this scene? We know the rest of the story – that somehow God provided enough food for the widow, her son and Elijah to not starve to death. God would also provide healing power to revive the widow's ill son.

Elijah's audacity seems to be rooted in a place of deep faith that God's presence with them would be enough for what they needed. I wonder if you can bring to mind a situation in your life at this time where a positive change might occur if you place more trust in God (that is, Love) to infuse your circumstances. Might faith empower you to act with more audacity, risk-taking and trust toward co-creating a better future? Could you make that investment soon – even now!?

Elijah and the woman became Wild Woosey companions. Who might be a new or renewed companion for you? Who might move with you in a palm-on-palm, eyes-locked, full-weight mutual lean?

I invite you to hear just a few of Newcomer's lyrics again. Perhaps close your eyes and hear what speaks to a circumstance that is inviting your audacity, risk-taking and trust:

"If not now, tell me when?"

We may never see this moment or place in time again

If not now, if not now, tell me when?"

And it will take a change of heart for this to mend

But miracles do happen every shining now and then

If not now, if not now, tell me when?"

Let's turn now to our reading from the gospel of Mark. There we meet a Jesus who speaks truth in succinct ways. Jesus warns his disciples to beware of people whose behavior is motivated by concern for how they will be perceived by others – people who make behavioral choices *"for the sake of appearance."*

Do you ever behave for the sake of appearance? I know that I do – in both semiconscious habitual ways and through conscious choice. As Christians, we are called to embody the way of Jesus in our attitudes, behaviors, and interactions with one another. How we appear to others does matter. Our actions reflect the values of our nuclear family, our understanding of Jesus' mission, and the values of wider communities to which we belong. Jesus does not question the integrity or goodness of behaving according to our values. It is good to be mindful of how we appear to others. Appearing to behave in ways that align with our core values helps to build trust. What Jesus calls our attention to is the sinful shadow side of pride.

Pride is defined as *"a feeling of deep pleasure or satisfaction derived from one's own achievements, the achievements of those with whom one is closely associated, or from qualities or possessions that are widely admired."*

Pride can be healthy. I do not hesitate to feel and share my pride related to the ministries of our congregation. I derive pleasure and satisfaction from our endeavors. The shadow side of pride would overwhelm its healthy, invigorating effects if I would let satisfaction become what motivates my involvement in our ministries. So today we consider how Jesus calls us to a life of behavior that is for the sake of love (motivated by endless opportunities to love God, self and other), not motivated by the sake of appearance.

Let's hear again how Jesus experienced and reflected on the moment in which he witnessed how a woman gave her tremendous love offering. Here was Jesus' response to that moment: *"Jesus called out to the disciples and said to them, 'The truth is, this woman has put in more than all who have contributed to the treasury; for they have put in money from their surplus, but she has put in everything she possessed from the little she had—all she had to live on.'"*

Let's return to the Wild Woosey for a moment. I wonder: Did my explanation of the activity leave you with a sense of uneasiness. Well, hear this good news. The two participants were not alone. Eight to ten others were watching them carefully. And before the two ever let go of the trunk of the tree the community began to fold in to fill the space between the shaky cables. On either side of the pair's bodies, the community stood with knees flexed and arms ready, shoulder to shoulder. And as the two moved along the shaky cables (I think I got out there with my own partner about seven to eight feet out), the partners eventually had to fall into the arms of their community. The more successful they were, the more the two achieved, they only could do by trusting the arms of their community.

Across two millennia, Christians have derived a variety of meanings from today's vignette from the gospel of Mark. The woman teaches us a lesson about generosity that is not for the sake of appearance, but for the sake of love. She apparently gave a larger proportion of her money to the faith community than did many of her more affluent neighbors.

Her poverty reminds us that many of us could give away more of our energy, skills and money for the greater good that we choose. As we witness and encourage in this congregation, I hope that the woman's friends were a strong Wild Woosey type of community for her – that they stood together, saw her, and were ready to sustain her as she moved along the shaky cables. I hope they expressed appreciation directly and out loud for the ways in which she invested herself in the community and that those same friends with humility invited her to lean into them for any support they could offer such a fearless, generously loving person.

This is the time in the life of our church each year when we consider how we can support our church. And we will hear from David in a few moments as our witnessing steward. This is my one time that I'll share my brief thought. The traditional Christian practice of tithing – offering ten percent of one's material goods for the greater good of the community – is based in a Judeo-Christian understanding that a person of faith strives to dedicate one hundred percent of self to love of God, self and other; yet also sets aside a portion of their possessions to share in spaces where need and pain are immense and life-affirming trust is possible.

So how will we as people of faith discern to what areas of need we will direct ourselves (that is, both one hundred percent of our selfhood and a portion of our material goods) – within the life of this congregation and in many other places of good action toward love and justice? Current local and global affairs, our own experiences, and sacred scriptures all provide solid guidance if we are seriously looking to participate in Wild Woosey type partnerships where need and pain could be alleviated, loneliness eradicated, and trust nurtured. Let's become Wild Woosey participants because God's love is counting on us.

Amen!

Rev. Clare Gromoll
St. Croix United Church | Bayport, MN
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1 Kings 17:8-16, Psalm 146, Mark 12:38-44