

The Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 18, 2016
The Rev. Robert H. Malm

Trust

Last July, an important anniversary passed by very quietly. Sixty years ago, on July 30, 1956, President Eisenhower signed into law a bill Congress had passed, establishing the official motto of the United States and requiring that this motto appear on all of our national coinage and currency. “In God We Trust.” We know these words well. In fact, since 1864 this phrase, originally from Francis Scott Key’s “Star-Spangled Banner,” written during the War of 1812, had appeared from time to time on many of our coins. In 1956 it became official, the law.

“In God We Trust” seems somewhat old-fashioned today. Perhaps that’s because 50 years ago, 98% of the adults in the United States believed in God. Today the figure is under 80%! Trust has become a much-politicized word. Never before in a presidential election has trust been such an issue. Mrs. Clinton says we can’t trust Mr. Trump, and Mr. Trump says we can’t trust Mrs. Clinton.

If you Google a list of people most trusted, the Readers’ Digest poll tells you that the #1 person trusted in the United States is Tom Hanks. In fact, actors and entertainers make up most of the Top Ten; only Maya Angelou, the Poet and Professor, and Bill Gates and his wife make the list as non “show biz” people. Michelle Obama is #19. I didn’t go down any further to actually see where the President is listed (#65)!

Trust is a huge part of our faith, our belief in God. Today is a celebration of trust as we begin our program year. In a few minutes (during the 9 a.m. liturgy) we will commission 38 adults who will teach our children and sponsor our youth. We trust them to care for our young people, to help them to know Jesus, love Jesus, follow Jesus.

Pollsters tell us that the fastest-growing religious group in our nation is the “nones” – atheists, agnostics, those who do not believe in any organized religion. They now make up about 25% of the adult population. Some 80% of the people in this group have rejected the faith they were brought up in. We trust our teachers and youth leaders to help our children grow in the faith that will sustain them their entire lives.

During the 11:15 liturgy today, we will baptize a young adult who recently discovered that he could trust in God through Grace Church. Mehdi left his home in Iran and came to the United States seeking asylum. He was walking past our church when he decided to come in, even though he was not a Christian. He discovered Jesus. He felt God’s love. We don’t have many Farsi speakers here at Grace, and Mehdi has found a small Christian community speaking Farsi and worshipping in Farsi in McLean. But Mehdi wants to be baptized here because Grace is where he first found trust in God through Jesus and the sacraments of the Church.

We see three dramatic teachings about trust in the life of Our Lord Jesus Christ. First, St. John tells us that at the start of Jesus’ ministry he went to Jerusalem for Passover. He

entered the Temple and cast out the money-changers and drove them out of the Temple. Many believed in Jesus because of this prophetic act and other “signs that he was doing. But Jesus ... did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people ... he knew what was in everyone.” (John 2:23-25)

Jesus knew that trust could be eroded in every human heart by fear, by sin, by evil. He could see that people had unrealistic expectations; demands, even. Jesus knew how hard it would be to trust in God, especially during very challenging times.

Later, during his ministry, Jesus used many parables to expand his teaching, make a point -- about God’s love, God’s grace, God’s mercy. St. Luke records so many of the parables that scholars refer to “Luke’s special section” (9:51 – 18:14). Today’s parable, often titled “The Shrewd Steward,” is really about trust. Jesus directed many of his parables to the Pharisees “who trusted in themselves and despised others...” (18:9). The Shrewd Steward trusts in himself and his ability to survive, even when he is fired by the owner. Jesus isn’t extolling his dishonesty, nor is Jesus saying that money is bad. Jesus wants us to consider where we ultimately place our trust – in God or in wealth?

Lastly, we see trust questioned as Jesus dies on the cross. He has found the strength, the trust in God, during his time of prayer in the Garden. He prays that “this cup might pass...” But God is silent. Jesus prays that God’s will be done. He trusts in God’s will. This trust helps him face arrest, torture, the trials, and the cross.

As he is nailed to the cross, Jesus prays “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing...” (Luke 23:34) As Jesus hangs on the cross, the “scoffers” and others who are passing by mock him: “If you are the Son of God, come down” ... “He trusts in God ... let God save him...” (Matthew 27:40-43) And that’s exactly what happens. Jesus trusts in God and can say at the end, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit... It is finished.” And three days later God’s love saves Jesus from death. Easter is our celebration of Jesus’ trust in God.

So we hope and pray that our trust in God will grow throughout our lives. That at the most challenging times, times when we are confronted by evil, sin, death, we will depend upon our trust in God. As the old hymn reminds us, “Trust and obey, for there’s no other way to be happy with Jesus, but to trust and obey...”

Amos 8:4-7

Luke 16:1-13