

FOCUS: The Good News is we are blessed when our trust is in the Lord

In the Name of the Father and of the +Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

What does “trust” mean? I took a quick look at one of my favorite Internet tools¹ to see how “trust” is defined. I expected to find trust defined first as something like “unconditional belief” or a description about the relationship between one person and another. Now, those definitions were there, but they weren’t at the top of the list. Rather, a more legalistic or financial definition topped the list. “Trust” was defined as “something of value for one party held for the benefit of another, such as ‘His grandfather set up a trust fund for him.’” At first, I thought there was nothing to this kind of definition about “trust” that related to our Scripture readings this morning. But, as often happens, a closer reading of the text reveals how wrong first impressions can be.

Jeremiah wrote, “Blessed are those who trust in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord.”² Here we have the word “trust” used in two different contexts. First, the context of trust is “complete confidence in the person or plan.” That is, one might paraphrase the first half of the verse as “Blessed are those who have complete confidence in the Lord.” That is a remarkable thing—how many of us have complete confidence in anything, except the complete confidence in the ability of human beings to mess things up as often as not? But, when we place complete confidence in the Lord God, our Creator, we are truly blessed. That is good news for us.

In the second half of the verse, we hear “trust” used in another manner. Listen closely to the text again, “whose trust *is* the Lord.” Note that Jeremiah does not say “whose trust is *in* the Lord,” as if to reinforce the idea expressed in the first half of the verse. No, here the prophet talks about the Lord *as* our trust—something of value being held on our behalf for our benefit. “whose something of value is being held on his behalf is the Lord.” Here, we have an equating of *trust*—the thing of value—and the Lord.

Jeremiah is challenging the people about the focus of their personal trust. The people have been placing way too much trust and faith in mortal things, themselves, and other human institutions, and in doing so, have forgotten who holds everything in trust for them at the same time. The complete confidence placed in human beings is a confidence misplaced. One’s complete confidence—or trust—must be placed in the One who truly deserves our confidence and who also holds all things of value for our benefit and welfare. The Lord God, and only the Lord God, deserves our trust.

¹ Google.com define:trust

² Jer 17:5 (NRSV)

When we place our trust in human things and persons, we are placing our trust in poor soil, so to speak. What we do and the time and effort we invest doesn't take a firm root, and even though there might be some growth or bloom, it is only for a short term, and as time passes, the shallowness of human things and beings leads to the work being for naught. However, when our trust is in the Lord, our faith and confidence is in the right place, and the rewards and successes are extensive and, more importantly, permanent.

When we start listening only to the voices of humans, even those who at first glance appear to have our best interests in mind, we start down a path that leads into a desert-like environment. When we place our trust in the ability of human beings, we are placing our trust in arid land, and that which is held in trust for us cannot grow, let alone remain healthy. Trust in human beings and human institutions only leads to disease, decay, and withering away.

In many congregations, folks have relied on the personality of the pastor or a small group of leaders as the source of growth and stability. The "Pastor is such a great preacher," or "Pastor is such a people-person" congregation is stable and growing as long as Pastor is there. But no two pastors are alike, and the next pastor might have different gifts to offer the people—gifts that are often overlooked when trust and confidence are placed in human beings and not in the Lord. When personalities become the issue, then the devious and perverse heart overtakes the place which the Lord calls on us to hold him—first, foremost, and above all others.

Martin Luther frequently talked about *Anfechtung*, the inner turmoil and challenge to faith that is caused by the devil trying to interfere with one's faith. The devil, Luther was fond to say, only causes trouble and turmoil where there is a threat to the devil's work—those places where the Word is faithfully proclaimed and the Sacraments rightly administered. Where the trust is in the Lord, and the work of the people is work guided by the power of the Holy Spirit, the devil is most active in trying to disturb things. Why, because the devil doesn't want to see the Lord's work succeed.

"Blessed are those who trust in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord." And what shall those who so place their trust receive from the "trust fund" held by the Lord?

They shall receive strengthening water—as in the water of baptism—that fills them with the Holy Spirit and keeps them filled and refreshed by the bread and wine which are the True Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. With the water, bread, and wine, the tree is strengthened, the leaves stay green, and the tree grows, too. The fruit of the tree is full and ripe and is harvested in large quantities never before seen. When our trust is in the Lord, amazing things happen.

Today, we hear a message of promise and hope proclaimed to us. We are called to place our faith and trust in the Lord God, and live lives as children of God and coheirs with Christ. We have been grafted to the tree of the Chosen People through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We are filled with the Holy Spirit, and we are called to be led by that same Holy Spirit in our mission and ministry in this place.

For too long, we have been placing our faith and trust in human things, and not in the Lord. We have wondered how we might pay bills or who might give more money or whether or not it's even worth being here anymore. These are the *wrong things* upon which to place our trust, time, and effort. Trust in the Lord, dear sisters and brothers. Stop and listen to the Holy Spirit. Let God be the focus of your trust, and know that the trust which is the Lord holds your salvation and life everlasting in the promise of the resurrection. This is most certainly true!