

Guided to Trust

Lenten Midweek – 02/28/24 – Mt. Calvary Luth.
Text: John 19:29-30 Pastor Keith Besel

²⁹A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to His mouth. ³⁰When Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished," and He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.

- ✘ As we continue along our Lenten journey tonight, allowing the season and God's Word to *guide* us *to the cross* where Jesus accomplishes and wins our salvation, our focus this week is on the crucial, yet increasingly illusive concept of trust.
 - ➔ Everyone craves it, yet few people believe that trust exists today in abundance. I've never known of anyone who thinks that trust is a bad quality to have. I mean, who would ever wake up in the morning and proclaim, "I am such a great person because no one can trust me"?
 - ➔ If anything, the opposite is more likely to be the case. In the TV show *Peaky Blinders* Thomas Shelby said what more and more people believe today is that "The only person you can trust is yourself."
 - ➔ What leads a person to be so untrusting? Well, it has been famously said, "Every time I trust someone new, they end up reminding me why I shouldn't trust anyone at all." Sadly we have become so accustomed to scam artists and persistent telemarketers and spam emailers that we really don't know whom we can trust and whom we can't. So, now we question every request; we doubt any claim.
- ✘ In fact, according to a 2022 Gallup poll, only 1 in 5 Americans (20%) now believe that the Bible is "the actual Word of God, and is to be taken literally, word for word." They don't trust the Bible! For a large majority of people, it goes against everything that seems even remotely possible that someone dying in any fashion, let alone by crucifixion could actually bring about life for you or me or anyone else.
 - ➔ Yet the more you and I come to know our God and the more we come to know our Savior through the gift of faith, the more and more it makes sense. As Christians, we all acknowledge the truth of our sin. The fact that we have disobeyed against God is a truth that none of us can dispute. Sin has happened – it continues to happen and we are all sorry for what we've done.
- ✘ The other truth we know is that those sins cannot just be ignored without someone paying the price; someone facing the penalty for those countless wrongs we have done. The Bible is blunt and to the point on that topic. Romans 6:23 says it in only six words, "The wages of sin is death." Now think of all of the sin in this world – someone has to die for all of that guilt – either us or someone else.
 - ➔ As Missouri Synod Lutheran Christians, we know that the Bible is true and therefore trustworthy. Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."
 - ➔ And because we trust what the Bible says, we also trust what Jesus says in John 10:10, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." And how does Jesus give us that gift of life. In Mark 2:10 Jesus speaks about Himself and says, "The Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." That's it: He removes our sin and our guilt, which then means that God proclaims us innocent, which means that we now have life!

✘ During Holy Week, Jesus was brought before Pontius Pilate by the Jewish leaders to be judged. Pilate asked Jesus if He was a king, and Jesus said in John 18:37, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world – to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to My voice.”

➔ You see, Jesus makes it obvious that the path that He has taken by God’s design is the path of truth; the path of salvation found in the hearts and souls of those who trust in the fact; who know that He is King. When it comes to truth and salvation there can only be one correct path. To say anything else is to be dishonest and untrustworthy. And Jesus is the one in whom we trust when He says in John 14:6, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”

✘ At His birth in Bethlehem, the angel declared the truth, “Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Lk. 2:11). And in John 11:25-26 Jesus says to His friend Martha in no uncertain terms, “Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die”. And Martha responds, “I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world” (John 11:27). Friends, do you and I respond to Jesus’ promise with as much trust as Martha?

✘ Now in this season of Lent, when we see Jesus nailed to the cross; when we see His head crowned with thorns; when we see the wounds from the whips on his back – it’s then that the rubber hits the road for us all. Can you – can we believe in Him? Can we trust in Him there in those horrible and painful hours? Many of the people who were actually there couldn’t even do it.

➔ They laughed at and ridiculed Him: “He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in Him. He trusts in God; let God deliver Him now, if He desires Him. For He said, ‘I am the Son of God’” (Mat. 27:42-43).

➔ What those people obviously didn’t understand was that if Jesus came down from the cross as they were tempting Him to do, then the guilt of their sin would still remain. What they didn’t know was that in that very act of His crucifixion, Jesus was being the King of Israel and the King of us all. Then and there He was delivering us all from the wrath of God. He was fulfilling His role as the Son of God; as the Savior of the world.

✘ We’ve all endured the frustration of hearing someone give us the promise, “You can depend on me...” but then not fulfilling that promise. It’s hard to trust in people when they don’t follow through on their promises, right? But even though the people at the cross thought Jesus was a failure because they believed He had not lived up to His promises, you and I know that He did follow through; that He did complete all that He and the Father had promised to perfection.

➔ At that moment – hanging nailed to the cross, Jesus displayed His glory as the Son of God to its fullest. When Jesus cried out, “It is finished” (Jn. 19:30), He announced for all to hear, that yes, He had absolutely completed the plan of forgiveness and salvation which His Father appointed to Him. Martin Luther, in the Small Catechism describes that plan and it’s fulfillment in his explanation to the second article of the Apostles’ Creed:

“I believe that Jesus Christ...has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His innocent suffering and death.”

And why did He do it all, Luther continues,

“that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness...This is most certainly true.”

- ⌘ Friends, those are words that you and I can absolutely trust, as well as the statements of faith themselves in the Apostles' and the Nicene Creeds. In fact we could call the Creeds our statements of trust; statements that convey our trust that Jesus finished what He started when He came to earth at His birth in Bethlehem by dying in our place on the cross.
 - ➔ Looking at Jesus there on the cross reminds us that, even when we cannot fully understand all that's going on, God does. He not only knows what's best for us, He knows the best way to accomplish what is best in and through the person of His Son, Jesus.
 - ➔ When it comes to trustworthy statements, St. Paul declared this in 1 Corinthians 1:23-24, "We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." So, instead of saying, "The only person I can trust in is myself" (which only sets us up to trust one more sinner), as Christians we trust solely and completely in the power and the wisdom of God. We trust in His Son, Jesus!
- ⌘ When we don't trust in God, what happens? That's when we wander aimlessly in all directions, but when we trust in God and in Christ, then our path is straight and our destination is clear. We are guided by the Spirit of God Himself right to the cross.
 - ➔ Where do we find absolute and perfect truth? It's only at the cross where trust is found. Only there is confidence revealed and our direction for life perfectly laid out in front of us.
- ⌘ So as Christians who have been guided to cross of Christ, we are now enabled by Christ to be a trusted voice in this world that is filled with doubt and fear and questions galore. Trusting in and looking to Jesus and His cross, we serve our Lord as a voice of faith and calm; as a place where people can find godly answers. We have no need to look anywhere else for security or strength or peace or joy, then to the foot of the cross.
 - ➔ Dear Christians, be guided to the cross. Trust in Jesus, and lead others to trust in Him for everlasting life. Amen.