

Trust in the Lord

Proverbs 3:5-6

This has been an interesting month for me. Three weeks ago while Jongsoon attended the JAMA Conference, I attended worship with my friend at his church, Wylie's First Baptist Church (Wylie is a suburb of Dallas). Two weeks ago we were here for service with Rev. Curd speaking on the temptations of Jesus. Last week I was on a retreat with Holy Spirit Catholic Church. Because of all this, you'll have to excuse me if I may come forward for an alter call, make a casserole, or genuflect during today's service. That said, it has been an awesome, Spirit-filled journey for me – an experience that I hope to be able to share with you this morning.

Introduction To ACTS

On the screen you see the painting that accompanied our theme for the ACTS Retreat. Its basis is from the Gospel of Matthew 14:22-36 (the story is also found in the Gospel of Mark 6:45-51 and the Gospel of John 6:16-21). It occurs after Jesus fed the 5,000 with only two fish and five loaves of bread. While Jesus dismissed the crowd and went to pray on the mountain side, the disciples set out in a boat for Gennesaret. They were traveling against the winds and were not making good time. However, they were a considerable distance from the shore. Early in the morning, before the dawn, the disciples saw Jesus walking toward them on the lake and were terrified. Jesus tried to calm them and said, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." Peter – in typical Peter fashion – replied, "Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water." Jesus told him to come and Peter began to walk toward him on the water. The rest of the disciples looked on with amazement but remained in the boat. Ultimately Peter realized what he was doing and began to sink. The Lord reached out his hand and caught him saying, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

The scripture verse for the retreat is one which we're all familiar with. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding." We've said it many times; probably even sang about it in our youth on a VBS or during Sunday School. We've probably told someone recently who was in a difficult spot (someone that is retiring from the military and looking for a job for example) that they needed to trust in the Lord. Have we taken our own advice though? Do we really understand what the passage is calling us to do or do we explain it away by rationalizing and coming up with other reasons (aka excuses)?

Trust In The Lord With All Your Heart

If we look through the Bible (NIV translation) we find that the word trust – or a variation of it – occurs 164 times. The very first time it is used is in Exodus 14:31, "And when the Israelites saw the great power the Lord displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant." Isn't that typical? Our trust in the Lord appears AFTER His power is displayed. Time and time again in the Old Testament, the Israelites would trust the Lord after He displayed His power.

The New Testament would be different though, wouldn't it? After all, Jesus had come and showed that He is, "the way, the truth, and the light." (John 14:16) One would think so but that is not the case. The first time that it is used is at Jesus' crucifixion in the Gospel of Matthew 27:42-

Korean United Methodist Church at San Antonio
Sermon by Tom White

44, "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! He's the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" In the same way the robbers who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him." Even the non-believers, those wanting Him dead, recognized Jesus' steadfast trust in God. Yet it wasn't until His death on the cross that they did so and it wasn't in their searching for faith that they came across it.

Fast forward to today and I don't think that it's any easier for us. It's easy to trust Him when things are going well. I think that all of us have experienced that. We're cruising along: a new promotion, we're not arguing with our spouse, the Cowboys are winning playoff games, etc. However, are we able to truly trust Him when things aren't going well? What compounds the problem even more is that we have an even harder time trying to discern God's will for us.

There are two keys for knowing God's will for a given situation. First, make sure what we are asking for or considering doing is not something the Bible forbids. Second, make sure that it will glorify God and help us grow spiritually. If these two things are true and God still is not giving us what we are asking for – then it is likely not God's will for us to have it. Or, perhaps we just need to wait a little while longer for it. Knowing God's will can be difficult at times. People want God to basically tell us what to do – where to work, where to live, who to marry, etc. Romans 12:2 tells us, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will."

God rarely gives us such direct and specific of information. God allows us to make choices regarding these things. The only decision God does not want us to make is the decision to sin or resist His will. God wants us to make choices that are in agreement with His will. So, how do we know what God's will is for us? If we are walking closely with the Lord and truly desiring His will for our life – God will place His desires on our heart. The key is wanting God's will, not our own. "Delight yourself in the LORD and He will give you the desires of your heart." (Psalm 37:4) If the Bible does not speak against it, and it can genuinely benefit us spiritually, then the Bible gives us the "permission" to make decisions.

Before leaving Hawaii, Jongsoon and I asked our Pastor to provide us with some information on Korean UMCs in El Paso. He gave us the name of the Pastor (which turned out to be incorrect because Pastor Sim had just recently been appointed to the church), address, and phone number of the lone KUMC. We arrived in El Paso on a Saturday and after checking into our hotel room, we took a drive out to the church. As we pulled into the parking lot, we found the Pastor and his wife doing some work on the church grounds. We met with them for a few minutes, toured the church (they maintained the 1970's décor pretty well), and returned the next day for the English and Korean services. I remember that we left there on Sunday feeling a little disappointed. The church that we attended in Hawaii – the Aiea KUMC – was a very Spirit-filled and vibrant church. There were only a handful of members in the El Paso church and it seemed as if the Spirit had left those that did attend.

The next weekend we flew to Dallas to pick up our car which had been shipped back to Los Angeles and then trucked to Lewisville (which is just north of Dallas). We spent the weekend

with our friends and attended the Wesley KUMC in Garland, a church that we attended for three years when I was on recruiting duty. Both Jongsoon and I had been praying about which church we should attend when we returned to El Paso, but hadn't spoken to each other about it. After the service we spoke with the Wesley KUMC Pastor about our predicament. He was very adamant that we should serve in the El Paso KUMC and assist the Pastor there. Jongsoon and I were both surprised as we revealed individually that was exactly what the Spirit had spoken to each of us. It felt as if we were assigned there as missionaries and for the next 10 months we would serve in many roles, supporting both the Pastor and the church.

If we had not been in prayer seeking discernment of God's will, we would have missed the opportunity that He had placed before us. We wouldn't be where we are on our faith walk today if we hadn't been listening for His voice. That's not to say that we've always heard Him or even listened to Him. But when we have, our life is much fuller and more complete – not necessarily better or more comfortable – than when we haven't.

Lean Not On Your Own Understanding

So okay, maybe we have discernment for God's will and maybe we don't. Surely God has given us common sense to see us through the difficult times, right? What we need to remember is that the price tag for trusting in the Lord with all our heart is that we must give up our trust in ourselves. This sounds almost blasphemous to us. We are trained from an early age to put our trust in ourselves and others. In the military we're taught to trust our battle buddy, our wing man, or our ship mate.

This was proven over and over in our discussions on the retreat. It seemed that everyone had tremendous difficulty in letting go of the controls. Yet when we looked at the best times in our lives it was when we knew that God was firmly in control. What we're inclined to do is continue with our trust in ourselves and others and then add this on to our trust in God. However, this may be "trust in the Lord," but it is NOT "with all our heart."

Jeremiah 17:5-8 drives the point home where it says, "This is what the LORD says: "Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the LORD. He will be like a bush in the wastelands; he will not see prosperity when it comes. He will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no-one lives. But blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit."

It's not merely our self that we must stop relying on, but anyone other than God. If we put our trust in God, we will be blessed, and receive the benefits of our trust in Him. To put that trust in Him we must spend more time reading scripture and in prayer. Too often we rely on the physical side of our life to lead us to salvation; when we do the result is physical salvation. However, it is the spiritual side of our life that will truly lead us to salvation. When we are in tune with the spiritual side of our life it isn't happenstance. It occurs when we study God's word and we pray to understand God's will for us.

When God says “lean not on your own understanding,” He doesn't mean toss out that wonderful mind He gave us. He doesn't mean throw away our common sense. He DOES mean that we are to subject everything in our heart and mind to what He has revealed in His Word. Nothing in our mind, nothing in our understanding, nothing in our reasonings can be allowed to override or overrule what God has instructed in His Word. Whenever and wherever the two come into conflict, God's Word must reign supreme. We must commit ourselves to doing things His way, not our way, even when His way makes no sense. Where our way is in agreement with His way, there is no conflict. As we do that, we will be trusting in the Lord with all our heart instead of leaning on our own understanding.

In All Your Ways Acknowledge Him

The first thing that we must do to acknowledge Him is to evangelize. Now, I'm not saying that we all need to run out and take Max Lucado 101 and Billy Graham 102, and hop on a plane for some remote area of the world. If that is where God is calling you, then by all means you should answer His calling (we'll talk about that a little later). However, for the rest of us it is a little easier, just a little. The great hymn “Christ for the Whole Wide World” written by H.B. Allen gives us insight, if not the answer:

And we who cannot go
To bear His tidings far
Will pray for those who take the Word
And witness where we are.

There are many things that happen in our life that we rush to tell others about. Things like when we eat at a new restaurant, make a great new friend, or find gas for \$1.75 a gallon – we're all natural evangelizers. However, when was the last time that you told someone about your faith?

Now what I'm saying here you haven't heard before and I'm surely not the poster child for evangelization. What I am saying is that we can all do better, even if it's just a little better. Some might call it subtle witnessing. How about things like praying at meals in public or doing business with people or at facilities that don't require us to compromise our faith? The act might seem subtle to us, but the results won't be. Let people see that you have found a new restaurant ...where the Bread of Life is served. Let people know about your new friend – the Man who said, “No longer servants, I call you friends.” (John 15:15) Tell the world about where you found savings – saving souls – in the Word and Faith in Christ.

And He Will Make Your Paths Straight

On the face of it this looks like an encouraging promise, and it is. It's a promise that with God's help as we trust in Him we will eventually reach the destination that He has in mind for us: an eternity of joy in His presence.

But it is also a little bit of a warning. It reminds us that our path in life is God's path, and His way may not be the way we would have chosen for ourselves. As Jesus said, “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter

through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”
(Matthew 7:13-14)

God's path is not the path we would naturally take, and God's idea of a straight path is not necessarily our idea of a straight path. So the final element of learning to trust in God with all our hearts is being prepared to go wherever He is taking us. It may not seem like the path of least resistance at the time, but looking back we will always see that it was the straight path after all.

Sometimes there will seem to be insurmountable obstacles in our way, and we will begin to doubt that this is the straight path that God is leading us on. But this is all part of learning to trust in the Lord with all our hearts. Removing the obstacles is His job! He will make our paths straight.

As I mentioned earlier, I attended service at Wylie's First Baptist Church. The sermon series was titled, "Voyage: Life on the Edge – Perfection or Correction." The Pastor spoke of two kinds of storms, obstacles if you will, that occur in our life: the perfecting storm and the correcting storm. The perfecting storm is what Job encountered. He was very devout and was blessed with great wealth. He went through his storm – experienced a lot of tragedy and loss – and came out the other side even more devout and even more blessed.

Jonah on the other hand, experienced a correcting storm. He was told to go to Nineveh and instead went toward Tarshish. As the story goes, he was swallowed up by a great fish. Finally, Jonah prayed to God and said that he would go as commanded and the fish "vomited Jonah onto dry land." (Jonah 2:10) He too became more devout and received even more blessings.

I had the opportunity to hear the testimonies of some great men during the retreat. Some tried to follow where they believed God was leading them but found huge obstacles in their way (a perfecting storm). Others placed the huge obstacles there themselves (a correcting storm). Getting to the destination, humanly speaking is impossible, but this is God's way of teaching us to trust Him with all our hearts. We need to trust His promise to clear the path before us.

Closing

Our theme was Proverbs 3:5, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding." This is quite difficult for us to do, especially the 32 men on the retreat. However, the Holy Spirit was there breaking us down and then building us back up in His glory. It didn't matter if you were a "mature" Christian or one that was new in his journey, we all experienced the power of the Holy Spirit. We discussed many topics in truly man-talk and all came away with renewed dedication to be the spiritual head of our family, together with the spiritual heart (our wives), by participating in Adoration, Community, Theology, and Service (ACTS).

I purposely did not share any of the wonderful events that occurred during the retreat. This was not to promote an air of secrecy about ACTS. Rather, it is to allow for those of you who have not participated in an ACTS retreat (there are separate men and women retreats) – and I highly encourage you all to do so – the full and powerful experience of the Holy Spirit that comes when you: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding."