

Un-Certain Sermon Series  
Can God Be Trusted? Luke 12:13-21  
September 25, 2022  
Rev. Kory Wilcoxson

We continue our sermon series in this morning called “Un-Certain.” That may seem antithetical to what you think a sermon should be about. Shouldn’t we come to church to confirm the things we can be certain about when it comes to faith? In a world where uncertainty reigns and the truth seems so elusive, church should be the one place we can say that we know for sure what we believe. And yet, if we’re willing to be honest, we probably have as many questions about our faith as we do about our world. The Bible tells us all these great things about God, but have you seen the world lately? How do we know what is true?

The concept of truth has been ruined by the 24-hour news cycle and pundits posing as journalists. A few years ago, the comedian Stephen Colbert gave us the word “truthiness,” which is now in the dictionary and defined as “the quality of seeming or being felt to be true, even if not necessarily true.” Feels like that describes about 80% of the news, doesn’t it? Long gone are the days of Walter Cronkite, when you could turn on the news and know you were getting the unbiased view of a trustworthy anchor. Cronkite’s sign-off line was “and that’s the way it is.” Can any of us trust that what we hear on the news is truly the way it is?

The erosion of trust in our larger society has spilled over into our faith communities. When you don’t know what to believe, you can go one of two directions. You can either embrace the uncertainty and live into the mystery of God, or you can double-down on what you believe is true and draw a line in the sand. And, unfortunately, a lot of churches have chosen the second path, making correct belief a litmus test for whether or not someone is a true Christian. And when that focus on correct belief becomes bedfellows with social and political issues, the waters get even more muddied. As followers of Christ, what are we supposed to believe?

To be honest, I think that’s the wrong question, and asking it has caused a lot of trouble. The Bible is a great sacred book, but it wasn’t written for 2022 America. While it speaks in general about issues we face, it doesn’t give us clear direction on what to believe. The Bible doesn’t address our modern issues like abortion, homosexuality, war, and poverty in ways that we can make an apples-to-apples comparison. So, asking “What we should believe?” is a flawed question, because I don’t believe the purpose of the Bible is to tell us what to believe.

Rather, the Bible’s purpose is to reveal to us the One in whom we are to believe. As Peter Enns says, faith is a who question, not a what question. We are not called to belief in certain tenets of faith, but to believe in God as revealed to us in Jesus Christ, and to use Christ as a lens through which to determine what we believe. For example, if Christ calls us to love our neighbor, then that should influence everything we believe, even if they don’t believe what we believe.

But I think even the word “believe” can be problematic, because it carries with it a connotation of intellectual assent. We choose with our brains to believe something. Instead, I prefer the word “trust.” Belief is a “head” word, “trust” is a heart word. When we trust something or someone, we’re committing ourselves to them beyond just our words. I might believe a parachute works, but it’s only when I jump out of the plane and pull the rip cord that I’m demonstrating trust. In case you’re wondering, that’s not a level of trust I’m willing to demonstrate!

So, the whole Bible is the story of God's people either trusting or not trusting God, and the consequences of that. Adam and Eve are the first example of people who put their own knowledge over their trust in God. "Sure, I think it's OK to eat of this tree, even though God said not to do so." Noah and Moses trusted in God and followed God's plan; Jacob didn't trust in God and made his own plans. As followers of God, we either choose to trust or not to trust. When someone joins our church, we ask them to answer one question: "Do you trust that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, do you accept him as your Lord and Savior, and do you promise to spend the rest of your life figuring out what that means?" This question implies that you don't have to know what you believe in order to trust. You can still act on your trust, even if you're not certain about what you believe.

That's truly what faith is. Faith is trusting in God and then taking action on that trust. And that's where the rubber meets the road for us. We can sit here on a beautiful Sunday morning, listening to amazing music and reading from the Bible, proclaiming with our lips that we have faith in Jesus Christ. But, do are actions follow our words? Do we do out there what we say we believe in here? If we talk about loving our neighbor and following Christ and being obedient to God in here, do we trust God enough to follow through when we leave?

Or are we like the guy in our story today? He claimed to trust in God, but when his farm produced a bumper crop, rather than keeping what he needed and giving the rest away to those who didn't have enough, he built bigger barns to store the excess. It's what I call a belt-and-suspenders faith. Just in case your belt doesn't hold up your britches, you've got your suspenders as a backup. Just in case God doesn't come through like God said, you've got your own little nest egg for security.

And, to be honest, that sounds kind of OK. In this parable, here is a man who works hard, earns an honest living, doesn't cheat or hurt anyone, and gains an abundance. He then does the prudent thing, putting it all back to safeguard his future and well-being. Aren't we all doing that with our savings accounts, our stock portfolios, our IRAs and pension fund contributions? Aren't we all doing what we can to secure our future? Isn't that the right thing to do? And yet, God calls this man a fool. Why?

I think it's because the man said he trusted in God, but acted in ways that proved the opposite. One of the Ten Commandments is not to take the Lord's name in vain, but that means so much more than not cussing when you stub your toe. It means not to swear something on God's name on which you won't follow through. So taking the Lord's name in vain includes things like saying you trust in God, but then living in such a way that shows you're relying more on your own knowledge than you are on God's grace.

The move from trusting in ourselves to living into the uncertainty of trusting in God takes courage. It's what Jesus meant when he said that if you want to save your life by providing your own security, you'll lose it. But if you are willing to lose your life, to let go of your desire for self-preservation and instead invest in God's work in this world...well, then, you'll save your life. Trusting in God opens up possibilities we might not dream of otherwise.

This happened to me about 13 years ago. I was serving a church in a north Chicago suburb when I got a called from a guy named Wayne who was chairing the search committee for some church called Crestwood in Lexington, Ky. The more we talked, the more interested I became, and after a few interviews, it felt like this is what God was calling me to do. But there were a lot of obstacles related to timing and leaving my church and moving my family. I was tempted to scrap the whole thing because I just didn't know how it would work out. I was uncertain.

Well – spoiler alert! – it did work out and I’m approaching my 13<sup>th</sup> anniversary at Crestwood. There are a lot of things that could have gone wrong, and probably would have gone wrong had I tried to force the issue. But at some point, I decided that if this was what God wanted for me, I was going to trust that it would happen. And believe me, that was scary, because I was giving up control of my future. But if I’m going to say it with my lips, I want to do my best to live it with my actions. I don’t always do it well, and sometimes I don’t do it at all, living more like Adam and Eve than Noah. But I can say confidently than when I’ve been willing to give up control of my life – to lose it, so to speak – then I have found true joy in watching God at work.

But this works both ways, doesn’t it? God calls us to trust in God, but God has also put trust into us. Back to Adam and Eve, God gives them the responsibility to have dominion over God’s creation, to care for all that God had made. In short, God entrusts the world to them, making them stewards over creation. I have a feeling God is deeply regretting that decision right now, but I believe God still has hope in us because God knows we are capable of being the people God created us to be, even if we don’t always show it.

Just as we trust in God, God has trusted in us to be stewards over the gifts God has given us – our families, our possessions, our time, our resources. Being stewards doesn’t mean we use these things selfishly or for personal gain, but that we share them as needed to do God’s work in this world. That was the farmer’s fatal flaw. God didn’t say he couldn’t keep what he needed, but God knew this farmer was putting himself over and above the need of God’s people. He was trying to save his life, and in the end, he lost it.

Today, we begin our annual stewardship campaign, when we ask you to prayerfully consider what amount of money you’ll pledge for 2023 so that Crestwood can continue doing God’s work in this world. In essence, we are inviting you to consider how much your trust in God translates into action. When we give to God, we invest in hope, not just for ourselves, but hope that God can change the world through our generosity. The invitation to share our resources with God is an opportunity for us to move beyond belief in something to trust in Someone.

There are times when I wonder if God can be trusted. Are God’s promises really true? And then, God shows up, reminding me that resurrection is real and that Jesus Christ is alive and active in this world. And my only response is to do my part to help build God’s kingdom here on earth. Some people do that, and some just build bigger barns. What are you building?