

**“Stepping Out in Faith” Rev. Luke Ham**

This has been a tough weekend... Between the increased tensions with North Korea concerning intercontinental missiles and weapons of mass destruction..... and then the violence and racism that took place in Charlottesville, Virginia, it has been for many of us...a time filled with fear, doubt and anger.

And as fate would have it, our scripture passages this morning is centered on the assurance of God’s power.... Our scripture reminds us that Jesus calls us out into the messy places in the world....and tells us that even if at times we begin to sink.... he will be there to catch us and carry us through....

But even with these assurances.... the deciding factor of whether we step out onto the water is comes down to one simple word: Trust.

And so, this morning I want us to look at three aspects of trust that I feel are important for us to consider when deciding whether we are going to take that Step out of the boat and take the risk sharing in God’s love, justice and mercy in the world...

**First, Trust in God.**

This is probably the one that most folks would expect to hear in a sermon on Sunday morning.

But trusting in God can be much more complicated than we think...

It is one thing for us to say we trust God will provide us with Guidance and wisdom while deciding which house to buy.... or whether we should take that new job offer....

But It’s another thing to say we trust God when the doctor tells us that there is nothing that can be done to treat the disease at this point....

Or when your husband or wife tells you they want a divorce...

It’s a whole other thing to trust God when a family hears gets news that their loved one was involved in a serious car accident and is in serious condition at the hospital....

Indeed, Trusting God can seem like such a simple concept but it can be so difficult to do sometimes....

Last summer, I was on a joint mission trip with many different churches from wide-range of denominations.

Early in the week, some international backpackers joined us in the work. And one afternoon, after the work for the day was over, a volunteer offered to take some of the backpackers from Taiwan to a nearby Lake to cool off and go swimming.

While on the Lake, 1 of these young travelers.... a 20-year old medical student named Ken decided he wanted to swim across a narrow part of the Lake.... And no one knows exactly what happened during his swim but the rest of his group quickly realized he was gone.

Lifeguards from the nearby Summer Camp, the local sheriff and fire department all responded in record time but it wasn’t until the Dive Team came in the next day that Ken’s body was found.

A perfectly healthy 20-year-old...there one minute...gone the next....

As I found out the news...I remember walking out of the dining hall where it was announced and looking out at hills around me and I couldn’t get the first 2 verses of Psalm 121 out of my head:

**I lift my eyes to the hills—  
from where will my help come?  
My help comes from the LORD,  
maker of heaven and earth.**

But then the big questions began to surface for me.... what is there that God could do to possibly rectify this situation.... because I can't imagine the pain that his friends and fellow travelers are going through.... I can't imagine what it is like for his family who is scattering to get on a plane to SFO from Taiwan after hearing this terrible news... What in the heck is the maker of heaven and earth going to do for all of those affected by this loss? *(LONG PAUSE)*

But...then I started to hear the stories from various mission coordinators about what was going on behind the scenes.

It turns out that as soon as the Taiwanese consulate heard the news they contacted all the Taiwanese-Americans who lived in the local area. And every single person they contacted dropped what they were doing and came to meet and support Ken's friends and family and friends when they arrived.

Even the Consulate General drove straight from San Francisco to with Ken's fellow travelers in their time of mourning.

And in that time, I can faithfully say that God was present and comforting and connecting the Ken's family with these Americans who had just recently become friends with him.

God was there working to bring people of different cultures together in love.

I know this because I saw the hearts and minds changed that day....as I said we had a wide range of churches at this mission site...some very orthodox in their beliefs.

Folks from extremely conservative non-denominational, Baptist or Pentecostal denominations.

There were plenty of folks there who would not be ashamed to stand here and say they believe that professing Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior is the ONLY POSSIBLE WAY to get to Heaven...No exceptions.

But...the spirit of God moved in a very interesting way this week.

One of the mission site staff who had been there for many years...who professes to be a Biblical Literalist and who has staunchly conservative views of God and Salvation and well pretty much everything else in the world, got up and spoke to us.

And he shared that the Ken and his family were Buddhist. And that as the liaison between the mission site and the family, he was the one who had to be involved in helping plan the funeral. Because it turns out in Ken's religion and culture...it is very important to have a ceremony at the site of where he passed away...because his family believes this in some way free his spirit.

And this staff member shared these powerful words with us: *"Five years ago...if you were to tell me that I was to help coordinate and lead a Buddhist Ceremony, there would have been no way I would believe it or want to believe it.....But Gods presence is so clear to me in this situation and I as a father and talking with the Ken's father know that the spirit of God is at work and dwells among us regardless of the name we are giving our religion or our God..."*

A self-avowed bible thumping, born-again, evangelical Christian...feels led by the spirit of God to take part in and help organize a Buddhist funeral for a Taiwanese man who he had only met a couple days before and who was just passing though....

**I lift my eyes to the hills—  
from where will my help come?  
My help comes from the LORD,  
maker of heaven and earth.**

We put our trust in the fact that God works in many ways to help us in our time of need...But my experience, one of the most common ways God comforts us it is through the love, kindness, generosity of other people. This leads me to our next aspect of trust I would like to offer up this morning.... **Trusting one another.**

One of things that is we need to strive to teach our children and grandchildren as well as remind ourselves of...is the definition of “church.”

Because we fall into this idea that the church is this building that we sit in on Sunday mornings...but the reality is that the church is people.

The church is you and me....

And for those of us who have taken the step to become members of the church we have entered vows saying we will support “the church” in 5 different ways---Through our Presence, through our prayers, Through our Service, Through the sharing of our gifts and through our witness.

And I’ll be honest...the first time I took those vows I felt like I was saying those promises to uphold the institution...to uphold the structure and the buildings...and while those things are partially true...I have come to believe that those vows really must do with supporting the people that make up the church more than anything else.

To be present with my fellow Christians in times of joy---like new birth, marriages, baptisms, birthday parties, music concerts, housewarmings....

And to be present with my fellow Christians in times of sorrow---the loss of a loved one... through times of illness and hospitalization....to be with people when it comes time for them to accept that they must move into a nursing home... or hospice care.

We vow to pray for one another....and indeed we practice that vow during our sharing of joys and concerns each week....

We vow to share in service together..... being the hands and feet of Christ in the world. And Through serving one another by bringing meals to those who are shut in...or picking up and driving others to church on Sunday morning....

We share our gifts with one another...we take one another out to a meal...we pitch in when we know someone in our community is struggling to make ends meet....

And last, but certainly not least we vow to share our witness with one another. One of the ways we can do this is through our men’s group and women’s groups that meet each week and now through our NOOMA study each Sunday.

So besides trusting God...we must trust one another and trust that each one of us is going to do everything in our power to uphold those vows of membership. We are going to trust that we are going to strive to be a community that follows the 3-general rule of being church:

-To do no harm to one another

-To do good for one another

-And to participate in things that keep us connected to and centered on God.

Now, I want to be sure to say that because we are all imperfect people...there will be times when we let one another down.... times when we feel we misplaced our trust.

But I assure you, for every instance I've been let down by someone in the church...there have been 50 instances of people who have come through for me in ways I never dreamed possible.

Trusting in one another is well worth the risk...and it is necessarily because God so often works through other people.... To trust in God means we must trust in God's people...we must trust in one another....and we must honor that trust that others have given us and do our absolute best not to let them down.

Trust God.... Trust One Another.... Finally, I'd like to offer one last aspect of trust that I find important as we live out our Christian life... We must, in part, **Trust Ourselves.**

Now in many ways.... learning to trust ourselves is inherently tied into trusting God.

Because what we are really doing when we trust in ourselves is trusting in the unique gifts and graces that God gave each one of us.

Now...I know there are some in this room who may trust in themselves a little too much....so much so that they start to forget to trust God and others as well...

But I also know that there are many here who struggle to trust in who God made them to be...

Because others have told you that you will never be good enough...

Or because some say you are too old....

Or because someone told you that you don't have what it takes to get the job done...

There are some here who have lost trust in themselves because there was something they used to be exceptionally gifted at, but now they can't do that same thing anymore...and they start to believe that there isn't anything else they could do of value.

But I want to say this as clearly as I can: Each one of us is valuable and of sacred worth!

No matter what labels other have put on you...no matter how much you don't think you measure up when you look at yourself in the mirror.... you matter.... you can make a difference somewhere and somehow.

I love the gospel reading we have before us this morning.

This story where the disciples encounter Jesus walking on water in the storm and Peter jumps up and says, "I want to do that too, Jesus."

"Jesus, if it is truly you, call me out on the water..."

It's a reminder that Jesus is not just God.... Jesus is our teacher....and what is the whole point of teaching... to allow your students...your disciples to someday be like you...to teach the things you taught and do they things you do.

And so here we have Peter jumping out of the boat so that he may be like his teacher.

But...the moment is short lived...and Peter begins to sink.... "Save me Lord!" he shouts.

And what happens...Jesus catches him.... because our trust isn't misplaced when we put it in Jesus.... but then Jesus asks this big question of Peter...

He asks, "why did you doubt?" "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

Theologians have had different interpretations of this story...some saying Peter doubted God's power... or Jesus' power...

But I prefer those who theorize that Peter's doubt had nothing to do with Jesus' abilities...but his own....

After all, when Peter is in trouble he calls out for Jesus to help him. He wasn't doubting Jesus' power.... Jesus still stood on that water....

No... it appears to me that Peter doubted himself.

Peter doubted that God gave him the ability to be like Jesus....

I think it can be really easy for us to look at the life, words and deeds of Jesus and say... "well I'm going to give it a shot...but c'mon...that's Jesus and I'm me.... there is no way I'm ever going to get close to that level...."

But Jesus wouldn't have called students...he wouldn't have called disciples if he didn't believe they could learn to be like him.

In John's Gospel, there are some powerful words Jesus shares with the disciples before his death.... he says "*I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.*"

One of the most frequent questions I get asked a United Methodist Pastor is "What Makes your church different from other Christian Denominations." And while there are a few different answers, one of them is in our belief that *we are moving on to perfection.*

Meaning...as we work to Do no Harm...to do good...and to stay in love with God...and as we work to uphold those five vows of membership we are moving closer and closer to a life like Jesus'.

We put our faith in the hope that someday.... probably a day far from now...but nonetheless someday...we might be like our teacher, Jesus.... Another way of putting this is that we believe that Jesus trusts in us, as much as we trust in him.

We aren't perfect yet...not by a long shot...but with God's grace...and walking hand in hand with one another we might just someday get there.

Trust in God...

Trust In One Another...

Trust in Yourself....

May we trust that Jesus calls us to step out of the boat into the scary and messy places in the world..... and that even when we begin to sink, he will catch us and help us carry on in showing God's love to the world.

Trust in God

Trust in Others

Trust in yourself.... Amen.