

TRUST: GOD AND THE WORLD

1 Kings 19:9-18, Psalm 85: 8-13, Romans 10:4-15, Matthew 14:22-36

Today's lessons are all about trust and the consequences of trust. So, I thought I would see what I could learn from today's lessons to apply in the here and now.

I began by looking back over my own life for occasions when trust was involved. When Chris and I were married long, long ago one of the things that happened when it was time for the newly-weds to leave was that their friends would decorate their car. Being very clever and knowing what was coming I arranged to park my car some little distance away and when we were to leave, we would jump into my brother's car and disappear before the boys could get into their cars and follow. I had been careful not tell even my brother where I had parked. So, all went well until we were safely in my brother's car; he started the motor, and, then just sat there going nowhere until all our friends had hopped into their cars and lined up behind us. We then went off to where our car was parked, and it was carefully and very thoroughly decorated for us.

A story about placing over-much trust in the things of this world! It is always a challenge, isn't it? On the one side we look at the world and the ambiguous issues it raises for trust, both good and bad. And then there is the issue of how much do we trust God, and how do these two worlds interact?

Our lessons today give us a couple of examples of this ambiguity of people who find themselves living in these two worlds at the same time. The story of Peter and walking on water is a classic, isn't it? While he looks to Jesus, he is able to act with confidence and without fear. But then the world impinges on him he looks down and 'sees' the wild water and his fear interferes with his ability to trust and hence to act. I must say I can sympathise with him! How often do we not act as we are called to do out of fear of the world? Or what will we lose? Or what will people say? And so on.

Our second example is in the Old Testament reading. Ezekiel in the power he has received through his trust in God has just wiped out the prophets of Baal and received a very real death threat from Jezebel. At which point he heads for the hills feeling frightened, sorry for himself and very much alone. Again, I can understand how he feels. I think feeling alone and unsupported can erode our trust.

It is worth noting in both these stories that God does not accuse Peter or Ezekiel of terrible behaviour, but kindly and firmly helps them do better. He grasps Peter's hand as he starts to sink and says, '*You of little faith, why did you doubt*'. Or as *The Message* puts it "*Faint heart, what got into you?*" I like to see Jesus laughing gently as he supported his crazy friend. He also reminds him of the truths about trust and the dangers of its erosion by the realities of the world. Those who strive to support the good in the world and oppose the corrupt need our encouragement or like Ezekiel they will lose heart.

Ezekiel gets an even better lesson as he re-finds God in the still, small voice, rather than in the spectacular storms and earthquakes. It is that time away with God and the rebalancing that occurs that allow him to continue to strive. Ezekiel then goes back into the fray in Israel and the surrounding area. Interestingly at the start of our gospel reading we see that Jesus, having just spectacularly fed the 5000, goes up the mountain by himself to pray. It is important isn't it to take some quiet time each day to rebalance our lives and to assimilate into our faith journey any new lessons we can take from our experiences of the day. Otherwise, we just find ourselves drifting along rather than growing in trust and character.

Striving to grow lives and communities in ways that God would want or calls us to do, can be difficult, slow, and heart breaking. Again and again in this world, we see hopes thwarted or perverted and gains come so slowly that we despair. We are called as a Christian community to take our part perhaps in working in these endeavours or, if not, then in supporting and encouraging those who do. One can easily become cynical or give up in these tasks.

I wonder how different the Ezekiel story would have been if some of those 7000 men we hear about later in the reading had come to him with words of encouragement and reassurance? I wonder how many people we know would be better able to continue in their God-given tasks if we had been more supportive? Amongst those we know, who is struggling and needs a word or a hand we could provide?

If we turn to our reading from the Psalm today, we find that the Psalmist was able to see a deeper, more ultimate picture in the structure of the world; in our struggles and where they can lead. It all depends on where we look. Like Peter, do we look to Jesus and walk in his way or do we look down at this world and its ways and start to drown. Do we surrender to this world's ways or do we continue our striving to make real the pattern of life that God wants his

world to discover and live. We must aspire to the world as God wants it. As the Psalmist hoped for his world: *“Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other; truth shall flourish out of the earth: and righteousness shall look down from heaven.”* Or as *The Message* puts it: *“Love and Truth meet in the street. Right living and whole living embrace and kiss. Truth sprouts green from the ground. Right living pours down from the skies.”* This is truly what we should aspire to, to work towards, to make real in our lives and our community.

The problem is, experience of the world dims our vision, weakens our resolve, and can lead us to despair. In our New Testament reading this morning we see Paul’s explanation of why the Psalmist view that the way forward is based on the integration of ‘right living’ and ‘whole living’ Or as the Psalmists puts it they have ‘kissed each other’.

In the reading, Paul has been spelling out in his own way, this dichotomy between the way of the world and the way of God. He says: *“Moses wrote that anyone who insists on using the [Jewish] law code to live right before God soon discovers it’s not so easy – every detail of life regulated by fine print! But trusting God to shape the right living in us is a different story – no precious climb up to heaven to recruit the Messiah, no dangerous descent into hell to rescue the Messiah. So, what exactly was Moses saying; ‘The word that saves is right here, as near as the tongue in your mouth, as close as the heart in your chest.’ It is the word of faith that welcomes God to go to work and set things right for us.”* We are called to work towards ‘right living’ and the consequences will be, increasingly, ‘whole living’. We can become the complete and fully integrated people God calls us be.

So, what is the situation; we do not pretend that the world is not as it is and we do not start by trying to make it better. We start in our hearts by learning to trust God more and more thoroughly, like Peter and Ezekiel. As we do this, trusting God works changes in us. As these changes occur, one of the things that happens is that, while we see the world as it is; we do not see it in despair but as the Psalmist saw it could be, where *‘ Love and Truth meet in the street. Right living and whole living embrace and kiss.’* It is only then and in the context of this ongoing trust relationship, that we can in turn tackle the issues of our lives and our world without despair and frustration for we recognise the realities of this world. The truth is that people cannot or will not respond through hurt, or greed, or pride. So, basic to tackling our and the world’s

problems is the extension of God's influence to more and more people. As Paul says; *"But how can people call for help if they do not know who to trust? And how can they know who to trust if they have not heard of the One who can be trusted? And how can they hear if nobody tells them?"*

At the end of the Ezekiel reading, we find him ready and willing to trust God and, with a set of new tasks, to return to the world of Baal and Jezebel.

The same is true with us. Transforming our world does not start with action but it starts in our hearts with growing trust in God. The growing transformation in us that is a consequence of this can lead to growing transformation of our world as the offer of God's enabling power is taken up.

Lord help us to take the time to set our hearts right with you and see the world as it truly is; so that we may go into our small part of the world and help make it a little more right with you. Amen