

Placing trust

Psalm 52; Luke 10:38-42

One of the unnerving, comforting, pointed things about following the lectionary, is how it can speak to a situation we face in life, or the world, today. The psalm was written by David as he vented his feelings about an official at the court of King Saul who had informed against David. He was frightened for his life, and expressed his fear in the words of this song. It's a reminder that the Bible isn't always cosy and comforting. People in fear and terror needing to express their feelings against injustice and cruelty wrote some of the Bible. It makes for uncomfortable, but realistic reading. This psalm is written against someone, "whose life is characterized by a false set of values, who believes that money guarantees all that is important in life and provides power which can be used for purely selfish ends."¹

Reading this psalm, I wondered what it said to our world today. What does it say to the 'mischief makers', the 'sharp-tongued workers', and those who lie when the truth doesn't square up to their plans and ambitions for themselves? What does it say to those offering themselves to the highest office in our country? What does it say to those who stir up and sustain an undeniable racist atmosphere in the United States? "You love all words that devour, O deceitful tongue", sings the Psalmist. Here is one whose sense of values is so awry that he, "loves evil more than good."

Of course, the world as we know it is not so clearly demarcated and those who lie when the truth is too painful, or who use their position on a family level just as much as a national one are to be found everywhere. But it matters, and it matters because what this psalm alludes to is the issue of trust. Where do we place our trust, and in whom should we place our trust?

In a fish and chip shop in St Andrews there used to be a sign behind the till which read: "In God I trust, all else pay cash." Trust is something that is hard to earn and easy to break. Yet without trust, civilization and our way of life would break down entirely. Trust is the firm belief in the

¹ Robert Davidson, *The Vitality of Worship*, p171

reliability, truth or ability of someone or something. Each time we get into a car, bus, plane, or even tram, we trust that it will take us from where we are to where we want to go. Imagine the trust needed by the astronauts climbing into the rocket that would take them to the moon, and the trust needed in stepping out of the lunar module onto a place where no other human had been. Each time we speak to a medical, legal or accounting professional, we trust them to guide us and advise us for the best.

Where does one safely put trust? What is our true security? Does it come from accumulating the most money, the most 'stuff', or the most influence and power?

Against the reality of hurt the psalmist writes about is arrayed the hope of God's justice. When it comes to our faith, we place our trust in a God Who waits for us to take the courageous step forward into what feels unknown, only to find God is already there. It is almost as if each day we get out of our bed and put our foot on to the surface of our bedroom floor, we step out with courage once more into a world that is filled with hope and fear, light and dark, peace and strife, but doing so in the knowledge that God has already been there. God on the moon, God in our bedroom, God in this Church hall, and God in the streets outside. In God we trust.

If you are a person of faith, the writer of this psalm says you can be seen like one of the flourishing olive trees that were not only evergreen, but also drew strength from God's earth. The olive tree, which can have a life span of hundreds of years, was basic to the economy of the land...provided food, oil for light and medicine and was used in many different ways in daily life. Olive trees may well have grown in the courtyards of the temple in Jerusalem. For the troubled, frightened writer of this psalm, whose trust had been violated, the symbol of the olive tree was all that was needed for life because it was blessed by God. We can place our trust in God. God will always be there for us.

Which is fine for our relationship with God, but what happens when, as was the case for David, the writer of the psalm, it is people who betray our trust, and let us down? Christian people live by faith in God, but we must also confront and not deny the costly reality of human hurt. Our call to be people who live pointed towards a horizon of...hope does not give us license to neglect or

ignore the very real pain inflicted by fallible and arrogant human 'mighty ones'. Our place is to be those who perceive that injustice, whether far away or next door; who insist that it be named and acknowledged; and whose hope in the justice of God spurs us to redress those failing through prayer that makes us reflect, and words and action that makes a difference. "What counts in life is not the fact that we have lived. It is what difference we have made to the lives of others", said Nelson Mandela.

Trust gives us strength and sustains life. Should that trust be broken, yes, it hurts; yes, it's devastating; yes, it takes time for us to move on and rebuild something that won't be the same; but we move on, because of the trust that we have in God, and, I believe, the trust that God has placed in us. Did you know that God trusts you? Did you know that God believes in you? Did you know that God has hope for you and in you?

When you look at the investment of love and sacrifice that God has placed in you through Jesus, you had better believe it that you matter to God. God has placed trust in you. Now, have you really placed your trust in God?

Placing trust in God does not remove your responsibilities in life. A newly appointed minister went to visit the home of a congregation member. Upon arriving there the minister discovered his host was an avid gardener, and was only too delighted to show the minister around the garden, a magnificent sea of greens, purples, blues, whites, yellows and pinks. Wanting to set the relationship off on a strong, positive note, the minister said, "Isn't it wonderful when we put our trust in the beauty of God's handiwork". His host replied in a somewhat offended tone, "Now minister, don't go giving all the credit to God. You should have seen this garden when the Almighty had it to himself!"

The gardener in fact had very good theology. God has designed the world in such a way that God works in partnership with us, and we with God, to achieve God's ends. Placing trust in God means working in partnership with God to address steadily, or radically, the many ills in the world: local, national, and international.

The scenes from the Republican political rally in North Carolina have been, for many, some of the most chilling things they have seen. The film maker Werner Herzog said, "Dear America, you are waking up, as Germany once did, to the awareness that one third of your people would kill another one third, while one third watches." Lest we think nothing like that could happen here, on 11th July on the Borders Railway between Edinburgh and Galashiels a train passenger was told to "get back to your own country" by another man.

Where do we place trust? In a God Who will work alongside women and men across the world to stand up for justice, and to stand against persecution, prejudice and violence against minorities and the vulnerable. It's not a problem that has to be addressed far away; it's a problem that has to be addressed here. If we want to live in a world of freedom and equality, we must work at building a society founded on trust that will survive the knocks it will undoubtedly receive, and be something that we, by the way that we live and speak and act, will show we value and work towards, with every fibre of our being.

The late African American poet Maya Angelou wrote:

*You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.*

It's almost a paraphrase of Psalm 52. For what gives the person of faith confidence to rise each day is a strong trust in a God of kindness, truthfulness, justice and hope, Who stands beside us, and works with us, every day.

Trust has to do with addressing issues of truth, and handling it robustly, openly and honestly. In a world without trust, truth is also side-lined. We live in a world where in many places, including our own country, the erosion of trust has seen the silencing of truth. And that is a worry, and deeply unfaithful to the God of truth, the supreme embodiment of trust.

I close with this parable about Truth, and Trust.

According to a 19th century legend, the Truth and the Lie meet one day. The Lie says to the Truth: "It's a marvellous day today"! The Truth looks up to the skies and sighs, for the day was

really beautiful.

They spend a lot of time together, ultimately arriving beside a well. The Lie tells the Truth: "The water is very nice, let's bathe together!" The Truth, once again suspicious, tests the water and discovers that it indeed is very nice. They undress and start bathing. Suddenly, the Lie comes out of the water, puts on the clothes of the Truth and runs away. The furious Truth comes out of the well and runs everywhere to find the Lie and to get her clothes back.

The World, seeing the Truth naked, turns its gaze away, with contempt and rage. The poor Truth returns to the well and disappears forever, hiding therein, its shame.

Since then, the Lie travels around the world, dressed as the Truth, satisfying the needs of society, because, the World, in any case, harbours no wish at all to meet the naked Truth...

And where the World no longer wishes to meet naked Truth, there can be no Trust. Fortunately for us, the God of Trust stands by us, challenging us to be honest, and fair and decent, in politics, in society, in church, in our homes. In partnership, put your trust in God, and work for justice and truth.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

Amen