

Trust. Who do you trust? Who **can** you trust? There are certainties in life in which we all can trust. Death and taxes are the classic answers. I trust that the sun will come up tomorrow, even if it is cloudy and I cannot see the sun, I have confidence that there will be light and heat for another day. I sort of trust the weather man. I listen to the weather every morning, but experience shows that they are not always accurate in their forecast. So, I take what they say for what it's worth. I hedge my bets and keep an umbrella in the car.

And, there are certain people that we know we cannot trust. We all have had experiences with people who have disappointed us, have let us down. At times you and I may have even been someone whom others could not trust. When I think about the people I have known that I cannot have confidence in I feel a host of emotions; sadness, anger, disappointment.

Trust, or lack thereof, is an important theme in The Book of Job. Job brings us face to face with these questions. Can we trust our friends? Can we trust God? At the outset of the story we are told that God and Satan see Job and decide to test him. This doesn't do much for God's trustworthiness. But we have to keep in mind that Job is a dramatic piece, an expanded folktale really, a wisdom story that is not meant to be taken literally.

But what sort of wisdom is this? Conventional wisdom, and the proverbs, say that the righteous are rewarded by God and the wicked are punished. But, the story of Job tells us that sometimes in real life the righteous are punished, and the wicked are rewarded. So, the Book of Job delves into the big questions that we ask (especially when we are down and out). Can I trust God if I don't understand God's way of running the world?

As our story opens we find our hero, Job, a wealthy man with wife, children, slaves, many head of cattle and everything a man living in the centuries before the birth of Christ could want. Then tragedy strikes. Only with Job, he is dealt blow after blow until he is completely beaten

down. His cattle are stolen, his slaves killed. Then a great wind blows his house down on top of his family killing all of his children. Then, as if that wasn't enough, Job is then afflicted with painful sores from the top of his head to the soles of his feet. He sits naked in ashes with a potsherd to scrap his oozing skin. He is devastated. And in ancient times, and even still sometimes today, we look upon his misfortune and think, "What did he do that God decided to punish him like that".

Then three of Job's friends show up. They all give long speeches in which they urge Job to repent and confess what he has done. "Clearly he is being punished by God", they think. "So, 'fess up, Job. What did you do"? Job tells them that he is a righteous man, and has always been so. There is no reason for God to punish him. Because this story is a legend and not history, we are meant to accept that Job was entirely righteous, that he had no hidden sins that he was refusing to admit. This is an important part of the story because there is absolutely no reason why God would punish this man. Job had done nothing wrong.

Job admits at one point that another thing that has made his suffering so deep is that he is a laughingstock to all the people of his community. So, his friends don't believe him, and do not trust what he says. Job then, cannot trust his friends either to take him at his word. He is not only bereft of this family and things, he has no one in whom he can confide and on whom he can rely. Confidence and faith between these people has broken down.

In our reading today, Job wishes he could put his case before God directly. He still has faith to believe that if he could make his case before God, that God would listen. At one point he feels that God is smothering him with attention, at another point he feels that he cannot find God to hear him out. But our passage today makes clear that Job trusts that if God hears him and hears his story, that God will be just and will acquit him. Job believes that God is trustworthy.

God finally arrives on the scene in Chapter 38. And his opening words to Job are, “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?”(38:2). It sure doesn’t sound like God intends to be comforting and understanding of Job’s plight. God goes on to say that Job has no business trying to understand the Almighty. God’s ways are unfathomable and inscrutable. God tells Job that he has much bigger things to worry about than Job’s little troubles. Job understands that when he says, “See I am of small account.” (40:4)

It’s not that God is not just and does not care about us, it is only that we may not be able to understand God’s justice, it is beyond our ken. And that we can trust. Just as we do not see the sun every morning but know that it is there, the gathered experience of millions of believers, and the testimony of our Scripture reinforce that although we may not understand God, we can trust God. We learn from Job that trust is not about understanding, but about embracing that which we do not understand, knowing that it is where we should place our confidence.

The story has a happy ending for Job. Job repents of his arrogance in thinking that he knew what God should do and should be concerned with. But the Lord showed him that it is foolish for humans to think they can fully comprehend the Almighty.

The story we hear today from Mark’s Gospel is usually called the story of the rich young man. The young man uses that same train of thought which plagued Job’s friends; he assumes that God uses a heavenly quid pro quo. If he does something good for God, the Almighty will reward him. He asks what he can DO to inherit eternal life. If he has indeed studied his scriptures and read and kept the commandments, he should remember Job from his studies. He should know that God does not operate on that basis.

Jesus looked at him and loved him. Jesus knew that the young man was all tied up with his wealth, and was focused on his stuff. Jesus asked him not to DO something but to UNDO something: to shed all the things which stand in the way of him and his faith. Who did this

man trust? Well, he came to Jesus to ask this question, so he must have trusted that Jesus was someone who would tell him the truth. But what did he really trust? His money. His possessions. He could not imagine trusting Jesus enough to become poor.

But this story is not about taking a vow of poverty just for poverty's sake. You and I do not need to fear that God will think less of us because of what we have. But if we are not careful, we can find ourselves trusting in our possessions and their power to give us safety, security, prestige. Alternatively, we can trust too much in ourselves too.

I ran into many interesting missionaries when I was in Honduras. It was always so intriguing to find out why certain people gave up their previous lives in the US to live a challenging and sometimes uncomfortable life in Honduras. I spoke to doctors, school teachers, priests and builders. Many had given up everything as Jesus asked that young man to do. Many told me that they did so trusting that God would put them in the right place and would provide for their needs.

But God also wants to trusts in us. God trusts that we will use our intellect that he so graciously gave us. The missionaries that seemed to be on the most sure footing and able to help the most people, were those who prudently divested themselves of what was tying them down, but held onto the things which would enhance their mission work, and indeed, enable it to happen. To simply sell everything, cut all connections, and move to Honduras then puts the missionary in the same boat as those he or she is ministering to; impoverished, and without resources.

I hope that the rich young man, perhaps after going home and praying, might have changed his mind about following Jesus. When we hear that Jesus loved him we are being told that Jesus wanted to trust him too.

Why is trust so important? Because we cannot have a true relationship with someone we cannot trust. God has made promises to us his beloved people in whom he believes. God has

shown through the ages that we can have confidence that God's promises will come true. And unlike the weatherman, experience shows us, as it has shown our ancestors before us, that we can trust that God's promises of life, love and happiness do come true for us through Christ.