

***“Together, the Courage to Trust”***  
Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, GA  
Season of Pentecost, Sunday, July 3, 2016  
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Holy Scriptures: Joshua 1: 1-9 and I Corinthians 12: 4-11

**Joshua 1:1-9 -- God’s Commission to Joshua**

After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord spoke to Joshua son of Nun, Moses’ assistant, saying, <sup>2</sup>“My servant Moses is dead. Now proceed to cross the Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the Israelites. <sup>3</sup>Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, as I promised to Moses. <sup>4</sup>From the wilderness and the Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, to the Great Sea in the west shall be your territory. <sup>5</sup>No one shall be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you. <sup>6</sup>Be strong and courageous; for you shall put this people in possession of the land that I swore to their ancestors to give them. <sup>7</sup>Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, so that you may be successful wherever you go. <sup>8</sup>This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall be successful. <sup>9</sup>I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”

**1 Corinthians 12:4-11 – Varieties of Gifts, One Spirit**

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; <sup>5</sup>and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; <sup>6</sup>and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. <sup>7</sup>To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. <sup>8</sup>To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, <sup>9</sup>to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, <sup>10</sup>to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.<sup>11</sup> All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

***Together, the Courage to Trust***

A solo hiker walking along a cliff edge  
suddenly slipped and found herself sliding down the side of the mountain.  
Reaching out a hand in desperation  
she caught hold of a small, sturdy plant growing out of the rock face,  
and held on for dear life.

She called out for help.

To her pleasant surprise there came a response from above.

She said, “Thank God you are there! Help me out of this!”

"Yes, I will help you," the voice said. "Let go."  
She said, "Excuse me? Did you say, 'let go'?"  
"Yes. Let go. Trust me. I will save you!"  
She asked, "Who are you?"  
"I am the Lord God your Creator. I love you. Trust me. Let go."  
She paused a minute, then called out, "Is there anyone else up there?"

### ***Together, the Courage to Trust***

Listen to the prayerful Word from Psalm 34, verses 4-7:

*"I sought the Lord, and he answered me, and delivered me from all my fears.  
Look to him, and be radiant; so your faces shall never be ashamed.  
This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.  
The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them."*

Professor Walter Brueggemann teaches us that  
the 34<sup>th</sup> Psalm is "the voice of a trusting, confident poet.  
The poet wants to affirm the celebrative utterances  
the way in which the trustworthy God whom he praises  
has reestablished his life.  
The poet also wants to invite others to join in the celebration,  
and instructs them in the reality of a reliable God who calls to obedience."

"In [Psalm 34] verses 4-10, the speaker twice tells of the personal experience  
that motivates the invitation to the others.

In v. 4, the standard form of thanksgiving in Israel  
refers back to a situation of trouble,  
to which God has decisively responded.

The statement of trouble is signaled by the phrase, "I sought Yahweh,"  
referring back to an earlier complaint and petition  
that this same speaker has uttered.

Yahweh's resolution of that previous trouble  
is marked by the verbs "answered...delivered."

This simple transaction of seek-answer is at the core of Israelite faith,  
for Yahweh is attentive and transformative."

The Psalm goes on to innocently and joyfully proclaim  
that God redeems, values, protects, frees, cares for  
those who trust and serve.

"...As a baseline for trust and obedience,  
faith must begin at this innocent place,  
fully confident of God's attentiveness and generosity  
[and providential care].

Such a claim is reassuring.

Yet it is also a challenge to those of us  
who find our own competence  
more impressive and more reliable  
than childlike trust.

This psalm undermines an excessive confidence in self,  
as well as excessive despair about circumstance.

The Psalmist stands in the long line of those who have trusted and obeyed,  
and receive everything needed from God.”

(Texts for Preaching – Year A, Pp. 581-583)

Faith begins at this innocent place.

The place of trust.

The confidence in God’s attention and care.

The dance of Doubt and Faith is held on a foundation of Trust.

Any hope of a vibrant democracy is contingent upon trust.

Even our expectation that the value of a dollar bill is really worth a 100 cents  
says it in dark green ink or stamped in metal: *In God We Trust*.

### **Together, the Courage to Trust**

Innocently and joyfully proclaim

that God redeems, values, protects, frees, cares for  
those who trust and serve.

Isaiah 26: 3 affirms:

*“Those of steadfast mind you keep in peace – in peace because they trust you.”*

The book of Joshua begins with God saying:

*“As I was with Moses, so I will be with you...”*

***Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or  
dismayed,***

*for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”*

“Trust is firm belief in the reliability, truth, ability, or  
strength

of someone or something.” (Wikipedia)

“Trust is the glue of life.

It's the most essential ingredient in effective communication.

It's the foundational principle that holds all relationships.” (Stephen Covey)

Trust is built over time and experience, with small victories, one at a time.

Trust can be undone in one fell swoop;

yet trust can also be rebuilt and re-created and re-established,

thanks to God’s gift to us

of the power of forgiveness and reconciliation.

There are spiritual relationships between trust and peace,  
between trust and community,

between trust and democracy,

between trust and forgiveness,

between trust and justice,

between trust and love.

### **Together, the Courage to Trust**

Doris Kearns Goodwin wrote a terrific autobiography

about Abraham Lincoln and his Cabinet called Team of Rivals.

The book was used as the foundation piece for the film *Lincoln*.

Abraham Lincoln trusted in God,  
and he trusted that God would send people to help, to lead,  
to make a difference, to work together for peace and unity and  
justice.

One of Lincoln's gifts of servant leadership was his willingness  
to gather together the wisest minds in the nation  
and place them on his cabinet  
to serve as his advisors to govern the country  
– even though many of the advisors had been his rivals for the presidency  
and, initially, most of them neither liked him nor respected him.

Rather than surround himself with “yes men,”  
with people who would agree with everything Lincoln said or did or hoped for,  
Lincoln sought out extremely divergent people  
with a variety of gifts and opinions and skill sets.

He then synthesized the collective ideas and offerings and visions  
into a clear plan of action for the greater good.

This same team of rivals made the Emancipation Proclamation a law,  
and then helped bring these divided states into united states.

At the root of this remarkable approach to governance and leadership  
was a humility grounded in trust:

Lincoln trusted in the love of God  
and he trusted in the capacity of his rivals  
to pull together for the common good,  
that they too would unite to heal a hurting and fragmented nation.

Abraham Lincoln listened and learned; he trusted and included.  
He worked with whomever God sent, including arch rivals and rejects  
Today we have much to learn and much to teach about being humble,  
about listening and learning from those in our midst,  
about trusting those whom God is working though  
to heal the world,  
to heal our communities,  
to heal our bodies and souls.

### ***Together, the Courage to Trust***

Trust is the foundation of a spirited and vibrant democracy.  
Our local and regional and national leaders have much to learn about trusting.  
As do we all.  
We expend so much energy trying to keep some folks out,  
to deny others their place at the table,  
to shun from the collective  
or shut out from the process  
or shut off those who need to be in the  
conversation.

That is not trust;

that is fear, my friends, fear hard at work.  
In the face of fear and distrust stand tall;  
keep the faith God instills in you and me and all of us together.  
Innocently and joyfully proclaim  
that God redeems, values, protects, frees, cares for  
those who trust and serve.  
Jesus calls us to have a fearless faith,  
a fearless trust,  
a fearless church,  
a fearless community and nation and global village.  
The key component of trust is togetherness.  
Love one another.  
Put aside differences that distract and divide;  
celebrate our commonality and unity in Christian love,  
which then empowers us to affirm our amazing diversity!

Regardless of who is on your committee, in the pew, or in the  
group,  
work with whomever God sends.  
Regardless of whomever is your next door neighbor,  
your colleague at work, or the politician in office,  
choose to work with whomever God sends.  
Choose now to work with whoever is your leader, your  
teacher, your pastor,  
your elder, your child, your soul mate.

***Together, the Courage to Trust***

Good theology and good advice and good teaching  
only go as far as the actions they inspire.  
Sometimes the trustworthy activity of God's love requires some activity.

John Trotti, longtime librarian at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, VA,  
said that as a Boy Scout, he was told that Boy Scouts believed  
that they ought to do what they can to leave the world a better place.  
Therefore, when his Boy Scout troop went camping,  
they not only left their campsite clean,  
they always went around the campground  
picking up other people's trash before they left.

John Trotti carried this choice of clean living into his adult life.  
When John married Joan,  
the two of them would wander about town,  
picking up aluminum cans and bottles.

When their children were young, they pushed the baby stroller about town,  
filling up a bag attached to the back with the refuse they collected.  
Even after Trotti was a distinguished member of a theological faculty,  
they would still bike about town, filling up bags with refuse.

The Trotti family learned that the city of Richmond  
would pay .08 cents a pound for the aluminum cans.  
So they began collecting and selling the aluminum cans,  
giving the money they made to the Center for the Adult Mentally Disabled.  
One day while picking up cans,  
John Trotti met a man wandering the streets.  
“*What are you doing that for?*” the man asked.  
Trotti responded that he got .08 cents per pound  
for the Adult Mentally Disabled by collecting the cans.  
“*Do they make you prove it?*” the man asked.  
“*Prove what?*” Trotti asked.  
“*Do they make you prove that you are mentally disabled  
before they give you .08 cents per pound?*” [\[1\]](#)

### ***Together, the Courage to Trust***

Our Founding Fathers had great hopes of a vibrant democracy built upon trust.  
Trust in one another.  
Trust in the community to care for the last, the least, and the lost.  
Trust in the citizens to place value on other people’s interest and welfare.  
Trust in the collective to work together, to serve together, to put people before profits.  
Faith begins at this innocent place, at the place of trust.  
Have confidence in God’s attention and care.  
The dance of Doubt and Faith is held on a foundation of Trust, and the music is Love.

### ***Together, the Courage to Trust***

Oh, and our proverbial hiker friend who was last seen hanging on for dear life?  
She eventually let go.  
She had to.  
One can only hold on for so long...right?!  
We have to ‘Let Go and Let God’ at some point...right?!  
We either learn to trust and live in community,  
or we watch helplessly and hopelessly alone  
as life moves on and leaves us hanging there...right?!  
So she fell.  
She fell through the air.  
She fell through a cloud.  
She fell through the mist.  
She fell through a rainbow.  
She fell and fell and fell  
and then she awoke  
to find herself sitting on the floor by her bed,  
clutching her bed sheet and blanket,  
sitting smack dab on the scattered pages of the book  
she had been writing when she fell asleep,  
a book with the working title of Let Go and Let God.  
She found herself laughing, laughing, laughing herself  
hoarse,  
because she could hear God laughing with her,  
saying, “*Lo, I am with you, to the bottom of the page.*”

*All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!*

[1] William Willimon, "Pulpit Resource", Vol. 35, No. 3, Year C, Page 23-24.