

Trusting God and Ministering to All People as Christ Teaches Us in the Gospel

**"Trusting God and..."
The First of Four Sermons on our Church Mission Statement**

Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18

Luke 14:25-33

Bloomfield Presbyterian Church on the Green
September 8, 2013

Who are you? And what are you here for? Here on this planet, I mean. And, who are we? What are we here for? If our Christian faith can't help us with these essential questions--questions of identity and purpose--then it's not worth much. I happen to believe that the Gospel of Jesus Christ does help and in fact goes straight to the heart of these questions.

I'm not saying that Christianity tells you who you are or hands you a ready made purpose in life. I am saying that the Gospel of Jesus Christ plunges us into a situation where decisions are called for. Choices must be made. Do we or don't we commit? Will we or won't we trust the Good News that speaks to us from the pages of an ancient book? Yes? Or No?

If yes, then we've answered the questions of who we are and why we are here in a certain way. If no, then we've answered those questions differently. They are ours to answer.

God doesn't dole out ready made, fixed identities to us--like so many playing cards--when we are born. God *does* speak to us throughout our lives in various ways that call for choices to be made and loyalties to be declared. A crisis or an opportunity can send us in a new direction, which may lead us to reconsider earlier choices and actually change our minds, revise our positions, and come to new understandings. This is true for us as individuals and it is true for us as a faith community.

A few years ago when The Rev. Bob Folz-Morrison was your interim pastor, you went through the exercise of writing a new mission statement for the Church on the Green. A good mission statement says who you are and why you are here, and the one you came up with is a good one. We will be examining it for four Sundays during September starting today. I hope our focus on the church's mission statement will spill over, adding words and images and understandings to our own sense of identity and purpose as individuals.

So, please turn to the front of your bulletin and let's read together. Our mission at the Bloomfield Presbyterian Church on the Green is:

Trusting God and

ministering to all people
as Christ teaches us
in the Gospel.

Trusting. God. And.

The first three words are as far as we'll get today!

What a great start! Trusting! That is our first word, and it is an interesting choice. Is Christianity first and foremost a matter of trust? I think so! But not everyone will agree. In fact, nine times out of ten, we use a different word when we talk about Christianity--we use the word "belief."

The Apostles' Creed begins, "I *believe* in God the Father Almighty..." Different *beliefs* distinguish one religion from other. A member of our church shared with me a chance conversation a few weeks back with someone who turned out to be a Christian. "It was so nice to find myself talking with *another believer*," he said.

Listen to what happens when we substitute "trust" words for "belief" words in the above examples. The Apostles Creed might begin, "I trust in God the Father Almighty..." Instead of talking about other believers we would talk about other *trusters*. Confirmation Classes would focus as much on learning to *trust* God as on learning the *beliefs*--the doctrines--of our Presbyterian denomination.

Jesus' words in today's reading from Luke are instructive. A large crowd is following him. He wonders if they know what they are getting themselves into. He suspects they don't have a clue. He wants followers, he wants people to trust in him, but he opts in this case for what we would call "full disclosure."

Full disclosure: trusting me mean could mean carrying a cross. Full disclosure: trusting me means being loyal to me ahead of all else, including your own family, including your own hard earned money. Full disclosure: trusting me will require choices. You can't have your cake and eat it too. You can't add Jesus to the top of your ice cream sundae life as if he were a marischno cherry.

Following Jesus changes us. Following Jesus finds us in places we might prefer not to be, among people whose company we might not otherwise seek. Trusting Jesus means we say "yes" to all that brings life in his name and "no, no, and no" to all secondary loyalties.

Have you counted the cost? Jesus asks the crowd. Have you considered the consequences? Do you know what you are signing up for? Do you understand that your life may look very different a few years from now if you go on trusting me?

Trust comes more easily to some than to others. Our first developmental task as infants is learning to trust that each time we cry, a loving person will attend to our needs. What sort of childhood we had makes a huge difference in our ability to trust later in life. People who have had painful experiences in churches may find it hard to trust God. And so on.

Sorting these things out isn't always easy, so don't be too hard on yourself. But do remember this: it is *God* we are invited to trust. Not the negligent adult in your early life. Not the market forces that make it hard for you to find a job. Not them, *God*. Trust in God.

Why? For that we turn to the poetry of Psalm 139. Why trust in God?

Because God has searched you and known you.
God knows you when you sit down and when you rise up.
God discerns your thoughts from far away.
God searches out your path and your lying down,
and is acquainted with all your ways.
Even before a word is on your tongue, God knows it completely.
God hems you in (in the best sense of that word), behind and before,
and lays his hand on you.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for you (and me)
it is so high that we cannot attain it.

Where can we go from God's Spirit? Nowhere!
Where can we flee from God's presence? No where!

If we take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
even there God's hand shall lead us and God's right hand shall hold us fast.

For it is God who formed our inward parts, who knit us together in our
mother's womb.

We are fearfully and wonderfully made.

Why trust in God? There are no better words than those of Psalm 139. I have nothing to add.

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Trusting God is where we begin, but trusting God is not the whole of faith. The third word of our mission statement, the third word of the title of this meditation is the little word, "*and*." When it comes to trusting God, there is always an "*and*." Trusting God leads to actions.

Trusting God is not the sum of the life of faith, it is the beginning. It is the start of something. It is the generative center of all that we are and all that we do. It is never enough to say that we are trusting God, because trusting God leads to other things. There is always an "and."

Trusting God *and*... We never sit back on the heels of our Christian identity and say, "there you have it, I've got all my bases covered. I trust God so.... we're done here, right?"

No. Not right. Wrong. We are not done here. We are trusting God *and* doing the next thing, as Oswald Chambers famously said.

We are trusting God *and* acting locally. We are trusting God *and* writing to our congressmen. We are trusting God *and* volunteering our time and talents. We are trusting God *and* managing our money wisely. We are trusting God *and* fixing the roof. We are trusting God *and* making sure that this town knows we--the Bloomfield Presbyterian Church on the Green--are alive and well and serving the community in significant ways! We are trusting God *and* arranging the details of our personal and family and community life around that central affirmation.

Counting the cost. Yes. Considering the consequences. Yes. The cost is high. The consequences are many.

But we choose to trust. Yes.

We choose to trust God, *and*... do the next thing.

Together.

To the glory of God. Amen.

~Ruth L. Boling, Pastor

