

### **Who Do You Trust?**

(Luke 12:32-40 and Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16)

I stood with both feet firmly planted on the ground, looking nearly straight up. My eyes panned across the sky following the half-mile long ribbon of twisted steel that rose more than 240 feet into the air and then dropped straight down coming within a few feet of the earth. From there the steel ribbon bent sharply toward the sky again as it twisted and turned, going this way and that. At one point, the ribbon turned upside down tracing several consecutive 360 degree vertical loops and then contorted into a long corkscrew pattern.

All this twisted steel – more than 2,700 feet of it – was supported by a few large pipes bolted to concrete footings set in the ground. The twisted steel had a name. It was called *The Shock Wave*. And I was just a few minutes away from stepping into a small trolley suspended by a few small wheels that would travel the 2,700 foot-long steel ribbon in less than forty-five seconds.

Life changes when your perspective changes. That is to say, it makes a big difference where you are standing, or in the case of a roller coaster, where you are sitting. As the little trolley inched its way to the top of the 240 foot drop off, the world became small and insignificant to me. And so did my ability to trust. I immediately came to the realization that this ribbon of steel I was about to ride was conceived, designed, constructed, operated, and maintained (hopefully) by human beings – flawed and imperfect human beings.

The engineer inside me began to scream, “What do you think you are doing?” That scream soon became deafening as the little trolley on its little wheels began its near vertical descent. As the trolley gained speed, at some point, it seemed to stand still – as though it was frozen to the steel ribbon. It was the ground that was moving, rushing up to meet me. All my years of engineering education and experience flashed before my very eyes.

It was then, as ground zero was approaching at what seemed like the speed of light, that I realized what a stupid thing I had done. I had given over complete control of my life to a man-made thing. Even if it was for only forty-five seconds, it occurred to me that is was an incredibly stupid thing to do. But it was too late now. The ride had already begun and what a ride it would be. Please pray with me.

And now, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing to you, Loving God. Open our hearts and minds to the scripture read and the word proclaimed. Help us to know in whom and in what we are to place our faith and trust. In the name of Jesus the Christ, we pray. Amen.

On my last trip to Six Flags Great America a few years ago, I was dismayed to discover that my favorite roller coaster, *The Shock Wave*, had

been torn down. In its place was a new and even more terrifying roller coaster – *Superman – The Ride!* While *The Shock Wave* may be gone, the lesson I learned on my first ride is burned into my memory as well as my psyche. That first ride on *The Shock Wave* taught me about faith and led me to consider that phenomenon that guides us to place our trust in things human.

Christy has a friend who owns a jump school in Arizona. One of the many things on her “bucket list” is to jump out of an airplane. You would think that having flown airplanes for thirty years, that would be quite sufficient for her. But oh no, not for the love of my life. I know she will not be happy until she has made that leap of faith by jumping out of a perfectly good airplane!

Having said that, when was the last time you belted into a small aluminum winged tube with several thousand pounds of thrust attached to either side to fly 500 miles per hour at 35,000 feet. This is otherwise known as modern air travel. What is it that leads us to place our trust in things human?

The New Testament reading from the Letter to the Hebrews speaks of a different kind of trust. Trust in God – not in things human! God called upon Abraham to pack up his entire household and move from his native homeland, to “... set out for a land that he was to receive as an inheritance.” The biblical text tells that, in spite of the fact that this land was a foreign land; Abraham obeyed God and went without even knowing where he was going. How many of us would do that. How many of us could put that kind of trust in God?

Abraham gave up his comfortable and familiar home for an unknown

destination. He trusted that God was sending him to a better place. In other words, Abraham had faith. God made a covenant with Abraham and his wife Sarah. God, said, “You go where I tell you to go – without asking any questions – and in return, I will give you and Sarah the child you never had together. You will become the parents of a great nation called Israel and will inherit the land to which I am sending you.”

If you are familiar with Abraham’s story in the Old Testament, you will recall that his wife Sarah was barren and they were both quite elderly at the time God called upon them. In fact, Sarah laughed at God when she heard the promise. God kept the first part of the promise and Sarah gave birth to a son named Isaac. But Abraham never realized the second part of God’s promise. He died before the nation of Israel inherited this Promised Land. He died in faith, that is to say he died with the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not yet seen. He died believing that he would eventually inherit the Promised Land, even if it was to be in eternity.

There are many other faith stories in the biblical text. And even Abraham’s faith was tested later after the birth of his son Isaac. Faith is believing in or trusting in that which cannot be seen or otherwise proven. How many of us would do what Abraham did? How many of us would place ourselves fully under the control of God in exchange for a promise that might not be fulfilled in our lifetime? How many of us fully trust in God.

The words “In God we trust” adorn much of our nation’s currency. The term “one nation under God” in our pledge of allegiance has been at the

center of much heated debate in recent times. We are emotionally attached to the ideology that we are a nation “under God” and that it is truly in God that we trust. But when push comes to shove, whom and in what do we really trust? A ribbon of steel mounted on pipes, a thin sheet of nylon packed into a canvas bag we strap on our back, an aluminum tube with wings, or the currency of our country and its banking system.

We seem to have a pretty good fix on what it means to have faith in roller coasters, parachutes, airplanes, money. But do we really understand what it means to have faith in God. As United Methodists it is our fundamental belief that we are saved by grace through faith – saved by grace through faith.

“Saved by grace” implies God’s grace! “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son ...” This is the first part of John 3:16 – and it defines God’s grace. God’s grace is that which we receive because God loves us completely – not because we merit receiving it, or that we deserve it, or even that it can be earned by our good works. Grace is unconditional love, love without any strings attached.

“Through faith” implies that there is a required response to God’s saving grace. “...that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” This is the second part of John 3:16 and it defines our response to God’s gift of grace – belief in God’s faithfulness to make good on the promise of eternal life. That’s faith!

Saved by grace through faith! It’s embodied in God’s covenant with Israel. “I will be your God” – that’s grace; and “You will be my people” – that’s our response of faith, to be God’s people. Saved by grace through faith!

The reading from Hebrews this morning is not set in the same context as the gospel lesson from Luke. But there is what I call a “God-incidence” that connects the two readings. Listen to the last verse in the reading from Hebrews: “But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, God has prepared a city for them.” Now hear the first verse in the gospel lesson: “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

God is not ashamed to say, “I am your God” and furthermore, it is God’s “good pleasure” to give us the kingdom. That’s grace! Our response of faith comes through our desire for a better place, in eternity, and our belief that God has, in fact, already prepared that place for us.” That’s faith! Saved by grace through faith!

In whom do you trust? In what do you trust? Do you trust in all things human – like ribbons of steel, parachutes, and jet planes? Or do you understand what it means to trust in God, to have faith? Do you understand that you have been reconciled with God through Jesus Christ and called to faith? Through God’s justifying grace you have been reconciled with God. Your relationship with God has been made right. You are called to faith, to believe this to be true.

Through God’s sanctifying grace the call to Christian faith becomes a call to Christian action – faith translated into action – to live a Christian life. Some of the marks of the Christian life include: evidence of love of God and neighbor; dedication to continuous spiritual growth; compassionate obedience to God; doing random acts of kindness; patience and

self-control; and working for social justice in the world.

The marks of the Christian life are embodied in Wesley's *General Rules* for the United Societies, which are summarized as "First, by doing no harm, by avoiding evil of every kind; secondly, by doing good; and thirdly, by attending upon all the ordinances of God," that is to say worshiping God in all ways. So whom or what do you trust these days? Consider your faith! Consider your faith and whether it is truly a response to God's grace; and not just trust in all things human. Who do you trust?