

“Faith/Trust in God”

Proverbs 3:1-8; 2 Corinthians 5:1-10;  
John 14:5-6; Luke 18:9-14

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Pastor Norman Fowler  
First Presbyterian Church of Moscow

We have been thinking about our story. Last time we talked about some of the characters in the story. As we think about our own stories, we can think about who the characters are that populate our life. I want to think particularly about what characters we might believe, trust, and have faith in to lead us in way that's useful and helpful, and what kinds of stories they tell us.

There are lots of different stories we can think about. What story might be one that we think about in our own lives? What is the story that we think we should be part of? What story should be a story of our lives? Perhaps we should have that story of being a success of some kind, of having a career and moving up the ladder. We could probably point to people who have worked their way up, who are successful in their career. That's not necessarily a bad story, but it's not the only story, and is it the full story? There are other kinds of stories around us—the story of who we're supposed to be and what characters we believe show us those stories.

I can think about another story. It's the story that comes to us out of scripture, the characters that come through scripture, and in particular, the character of Jesus. So when we begin to think about what characters in our life we trust, what characters begin to be models for us, shape our lives, and begin to show us a way, we begin to develop ways of understanding particular things that will be really important to us. The characters describe some value, perhaps, or a way of being. Ideas like ethics, partnership, innovation, growth, integrity, honesty—all those can be good things, but how do we prioritize and how do we make them part of who we are, and what makes the central story?

As I was thinking about that, and particularly as I was reading scripture and thinking about where it says God is a judge and he would judge with justice and equity and that we'll all come before Christ, I was thinking about the idea of accountability. I went looking for a slide, a picture, about accountability. It was very interesting to me that as I looked through all those different pictures that most of what I found was about learning to be accountable to ourselves. That said something to me about our sense of accountability. Who are we accountable to? Well, if I take those pictures as an example, we are accountable to ourselves, or we should be. We'll be happier if we're accountable to ourselves. I'm not sure exactly what that even means because sometimes it's hard for me to understand exactly who I am to be accountable to. And yet, there's this sense that it's all about the self and self-accountability.

Scripture, it feels to me, tells us something a little different about accountability. In the story of our lives, the way we go, and the characters we believe and trust, there's a certain amount of accountability that we have that's beyond self. It's to others and to our God.

So there's a sense of accountability. If we're going to be accountable we have to decide what's real and what's not. What's a good way to go and what's not a good way to go? There's a lot of discussion about that in today's world—what's real and what's not—and it

reminds me that perhaps I need to take some time and try to figure things out as I go along, but it also reminds me that it matters where I look. It matters what story I believe.

Jesus tells us a story today, and he tells it as a story, as a parable, not as an actual event, although it could easily have been one. He could have been describing something that had taken place. His purpose wasn't to tell us about something that happened, but to use that description to teach us something about how easy it is to get too sure of oneself. We had a great discussion in Sunday School this morning where we talked about Moses and how often he touched the rock for God to bring out water for the people of Israel and one time he did it for himself. He began to get a little too big for his britches and God didn't like it. There's this sense of recognition that when we begin to let go of God and focus on ourselves that we've lost sight of the way and what is real. It's difficult sometimes to tell what's real and what's not.

If you're a pilot, you probably know that if you're flying in a circumstance where you can't really get your bearings from the ground or things around you, it's a very dangerous situation unless you can trust your instruments and you know how to follow them. If you don't, you are in trouble. There are too many stories where people have flown into the sides of mountains or actually into the ground because their sense of what was happening was wrong because they didn't have the cues they normally would have. At that point they had to trust their instrumentation.

When Jesus tells us he is the Way, the Truth and the Life, he is inviting us to allow him to be our instrumentation, to be the one who helps us learn about how to live life, what's real about life, what's true, and to actually experience that life. Sometimes in the midst of difficult times and struggles, my feelings are telling me one thing. I have to pay attention to what Jesus has taught me. I have to pay attention to that way of going rather than listen to my own inclinations. My own inclinations can sometimes drive me right into the ground. I need to listen to what Jesus is about.

There's a suggestion in our scripture lessons today that if we get too full of ourselves we will get off track. Jesus gives us the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector. One comes and throws himself on the mercy of God and the other basically is gloating over how much better he is than everyone else, not recognizing his own struggle, how he's broken his relationship with God, how he might be leading his people astray. This story is about remembering that mercy of God, remembering to trust in Jesus to lead us.

There are lots of examples of people who have done that. I thought of Mother Theresa, who is one of those common examples. She recognized God calling her into life, into loving people, and continuing to do that all the rest of her life even when things got cloudy and gray. There were another couple of guys that did something incredible. They spent their lives working to overcome slavery. First it was outlawed in Great Britain and then internationally. William Wilberforce and Thomas Clarkson, both of whom had their faith as a guide, went not by what everybody was telling them—you can't do this, you can't get rid of it, our economy will fall apart—but instead they focused on what they knew was right and good, what God called them to do, how people were to be in loving relationships and were not to use each other. So they went' ahead and did wonderful things.

I think about that idea of allowing Christ to be our way, truth and life. I don't know if I'm ever going to be a Wilberforce or a Clarkson, that I'm going to have international pull in some way, but I do know that every day of my life I affect the people around me and how I live my life influences them. I can either make their life terrible or I can try to make it good. It feels to me like when I'm trying to follow Jesus, the instrumentation tells me to do the good. It invites me when I'm tired to recognize that I get a little more snappy and that maybe I should hold my tongue when I'm tired. It invites me to recognize that a piece of criticism at the wrong time can be really hurtful. It helps me recognize that encouragement or an admonition at the right time can be very helpful. Encouragement, guidance, maybe just being able to smile. There are moments—every moment of our lives, really—where we are affecting other people and who we trust, the story we live, matters. So God invites us to live into the story he has for us.

That passage from Corinthians that was read today is an interesting, interesting description of clothing ourselves in the tent we are living in, putting on more of what God has given us to be to the point—and this is what struck me in that passage—to the point where what is mortal will be swallowed up by life. I was taken by that phrase and how easy it is to get caught up in the things we think are life and death, little things in our lives we feel like cause us to die. And yet if we're focused on the grace of God, if we are able to keep our instrumentation set on the one who is the way, the truth, and the life, as we recognize his invitation and the grace he's giving us, as we put that on instead of just worrying about who I might be, if I think about how I'm making life better for those around me, as I can express the grace of God in Jesus Christ in my life, he's suggesting that what's mortal will get swallowed up by life. It's an invitation to life.

In spite of the world around us that feels full of disasters and the teetering ways of our world, as we trust in Christ, the way, the truth and the life, what's mortal will get swallowed up by the life he gives us. Amen.