

April 25, 2010

John 10:22-30

“Trust”

We gather this morning in the light of Easter. Our secular culture sees the celebration of Easter as a ONE DAY event, just as it sees Christmas as a ONE DAY event. You may have learned that Christmas lasts for TWELVE days, just as the Christmas song proclaims. It extends from Dec. 25<sup>th</sup> through January 6<sup>th</sup>, when we remember and celebrate the visit of the Magi to the Christ Child on Epiphany.

Make a mental note about Easter: In the church Easter extends from the Easter Sunday date all the way until Pentecost, the Sunday we celebrate the birth of the church with the coming of the Holy Spirit. This year, the period extends from April 4-May 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Over the four Sundays that follow Easter in the Easter season, we are reflecting on the questions that will be asked of our confirmands at the 9:00 worship on May 2. These 8<sup>th</sup> graders have met weekly through the school year, learning about our EASTER faith. May 2, they will be invited to proclaim their faith for themselves, and become members of this church.

The hymnal, on page 34, provides the questions they will be asked. Youth Director Jim Best reflected on the first of these two weeks ago; Pastor Bromleigh moved to the second last Sunday. Today, we come to the third question:

***Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior, put your whole trust in his grace, and promise to serve him as your Lord, in union with the church which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations, and races?***

The answer to this question is: I DO.

Think about this. Think about what it means. Our young people will be making an amazing commitment.

And guess what? If you were received into membership of this church, or any United Methodist church, you were asked this same question. Our new members currently answer this question. We all say, “I do.”

Do you confess Jesus Christ as your SAVIOR? “I do,” we say.

Jesus is our Savior. This isn't a term we use much today. Maybe in old-fashioned melodrama: "MY SAVIOR!" Maybe on rare occasions when someone has come to our rescue. The image that always comes to me with the word "savior" is that of a lifeguard. I see candy life-savers, too. I see the lifeguard throwing me a "life-saver" buoy to pull me back to shore.

But that image isn't quite right, not for Jesus. Jesus doesn't STAY on the shore, where it is SAFE. He comes right down into the water, into the surging surf, into the muck and the mire. He comes to my side and brings me out.

Are you familiar with sinking into muck and mire? Have you been pulled under by enormous waves? I think we all have.

I get into muck and mire two ways. The first, and most common way, is through my own bad choices. I served the Crystal Lake church as Associate Pastor with three different Senior Pastors in the seven years I was there. One of them used to say, "My body is an example of what more than sixty years of gravity and bad habits lead to." I can relate to that, as I approach the milestone of sixty on my next birthday in the fall.

There are so many kinds of poor choices and bad habits. I have engaged in many. I see myself riding along in a buggy and Jesus holds the reins. We start out each day like that. But sometimes, before I've even eaten breakfast, I have grabbed those reins from him more than once. I speak out of my OWN puny wisdom to others in my home. I allow attitudes to move in directions that do not reflect JESUS' way of handling the reins. Then the Holy Spirit bangs me on the head, and I hand the reins back. But over and over I am tempted to do the steering myself. And sometimes I find myself sinking into muck and mire. Jesus is my Savior. If I turn to him; if I ask him for help, he will put me on the steady path with firm land beneath my feet.

The second way we get into muck and mire is from something, over which we have no control, sweeping into our lives out of the blue. A car accident injures or claims lives. A job is lost, and a mortgage goes unpaid for several months. An illness strikes a loved one or takes hold of one's personal life.

When, at the age of twenty-eight, my son-in-law was diagnosed with a malignant brain tumor, our entire family sank into muck and mire. Of

course, my daughter, his wife, was hit very hard. Our second daughter had returned to school at that point in her life, and had been moving into the field of biology. She then experienced a clear call from God to specialize in cancer biology. She began a Ph.D. program at the University of Arizona in Tucson.

When Gavin died a few years later, my daughter shared her sorrow and despair. “I knew I wasn’t going to be able to personally find some cure for cancer before it claimed his life,” she said. “I knew it in my head, but my heart still hoped. I felt clearly called before, and now I am lost and unsure.”

A few weeks later, this same daughter phoned again. She told me of a dream she had had. In that dream, she was given the assurance that Gavin is still with us, albeit in a very different way. AND, she told me with determination and joy, “I am clear again, Mom. I’m called to do this research—it’s to be my life’s work,”

And at that moment, I gave thanks to Jesus, who is my Savior, who is the Savior of the world. He is pulling us out of the muck and the mire.

***Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior, [and] put your whole trust in his grace?***

What’s the answer to this? I DO.

Today’s Scriptures speak of God’s care for us. They speak of Christ’s steadfast love and commitment to us. In both the Psalm and the Gospel we are portrayed as sheep with God as our Shepherd. How do we put our trust in God’s grace? By trusting him. How are we enabled to trust him? His actions in our lives and in the lives of others help us to trust him. This is one of the reasons it is so important for us to share how we see God at work in our lives! Your stories inspire me. My stories inspire you. We are touched deeply enough to risk it—to turn to God in trust, giving him THE CHANCE to show his care and love.

Stories in the Bible come to us through the voices of others who lived before us. Their stories inspire us and help us trust God as well. (Mention song on the VBS music CD—“Ancient words, ever true; changing me, changing you; Ancient words will guide us home”) Study and discussion groups help us to trust God as we witness to our faith with one another. It is our hope and

prayer that the entire confirmation process helps our young people grow in knowledge and trust in God. They learn from the Bible, from the church, from adult mentors, from the class leaders, from one another. Our prayer is that their trust will continue to grow, and we pray that prayer for us all.

***Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior, put your whole trust in his grace, and promise to serve him as your Lord?***

The answer is::::: (wait for congregation) I DO.

Ok, we come to that “Lord” word. We, in the United States, are not fond of that word. We got rid of the kings and queens and lords and ladies business back in the late 1700’s with the American Revolution. We like the egalitarian approach to life and community. We like the notion of “self-made” men and women. We like being independent. We like to DO IT OURSELVES.

We’re not so fond of the “serving” business either. We don’t like being someone’s “servant” and complain when family members cast us in that role. The only place in our culture where the words have some current application seems to be in the context of:

***“Hi, my name is Adam/Melanie/Chuck/Linda and I will be your server today.”***

That seems ok for a part-time job or a short, early period of life, but not so much for a life’s work.

But if we’re going to say “I do” to this question, we need to GET comfortable with JESUS as our LORD, and be willing to show up at his side every morning saying, “Hi, Jesus, this is Ronni, and I’m going to be your server today.”

The best word I’ve found to approach “Lord” in our culture is “Boss”. We need to promise that Jesus will be the BOSS of our lives. He will be the boss and we will be the servers. I know we wrestle with this, but when we abandon this model for our lives, we end up in the muck and the mire. Fortunately God planned for that, and Jesus, our Savior, will come to us and pull us out. BUT, life is much more delightful and less exhausting the more we can stick with Jesus as our boss, and know that we are his servers.

***Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior, put your whole trust in his grace, and promise to serve him as your Lord, in union with the church which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations, and races?***

The answer is: (wait) I DO.

We have said: Jesus is my Savior, I will put all my trust in his grace, I will put him in charge of my life as my “boss” and I will be his servant.

Now, we are asked to do all of these things as part of the body of Christ—in the church. I run into so many people today who say they love God and serve him, who say they are “spiritual”, but they have no interest in the institutional church.

Hey, I get that. All human institutions are really flawed. We don’t get everything right. Now, all of you are here today, so I guess you have some level of comfort with the “institutional” church. But there are probably things you don’t like about the church or about THIS church. I expect that is true of every church member the entire world over.

But here—we are asked to live our lives in union with the church. With the Church which Christ has opened to people of ALL KINDS.

Friends, I expect you know this—I hope you know this:

There are Democrats, Republicans and Libertarians in this church. There are people who do not think the same way you do in this church—about legalized abortion, about health care, about human sexuality, about immigration, about the place of women in society, or in the church.

But we all belong to Jesus, our Shepherd. Jesus says, “No one will snatch them out of my hand.” And we ALL without exception are sinners. We ALL without exception are misguided in some ways. The United Methodist Church permits great diversity of belief and opinions about all things. But we are UNITED in our promise to claim Christ as our Savior, put our whole trust in his grace, and serve him as our Lord in union with the church which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations, and races.

I ask you: what do you say to this? Will it be, “I DO”?