

-There was a church sign that I drove by a couple months back which stated in the typical block lettering: "To prepare for tomorrow, trust on the Lord Jesus Christ today!" I don't know if this shows I am a bad pastor or not, but I'll be honest: I started to laugh out loud at this sign as I drove by. I know church signs can be funny or inspirational, but this one in my opinion had several problems with it. The first thing about this sign message that struck me as weird was it's decree "to prepare." The way that it is phrased, It is almost begging for a John Cleese of Monty Python to come out in his knight regalia and read it to the peasant villagers: "Hear ye, Hear ye! To prepare for tomorrow, trust on the Lord Jesus Christ today!" The second thing that really bugs me about this sign decree (which Abby actually laughingly pointed out) was it's phrasing on "to trust ON the Lord Jesus Christ". I'm going to have to ask Mike McClintock, our true language expert here after worship about it, but, at least in my experience I don't go around saying "I trust on people". (But maybe I should?? "Hey! Sonja Skovlin, our church office manager, is really amazing. I really trust on Sonja")

-Regardless of whether or not this sign statement actually is proper english, I think it is an interesting example of how many times the broader church speaks of trust in God. Sometimes it's a little weird. (How many times have we all heard in worship: "just trust in God") Just trust. Of course we all carry around symbols of our trust in God right? It's even written right into our currency: "In God we trust". As a kid when I ran into challenges, I even remember thinking to myself: "If I could only trust God more, than it will all be OK" Is this what the church should be saying and teaching? All you need is trust? What does it mean to trust God?

-I think this is what our Exodus story of the Israelites in the wilderness is all about. The context of this story is really important because I think it's easy to miss the point. The Israelites have been freed from grip of Pharaoh and slavery, saved from the mighty Egyptian army, escaped from their tortured lives to now be.....in a barren wilderness for 40 years. This situation can really be summed up in the words of my little brother at age 10: "This sucks!" Being in the wilderness does "suck" in many ways and it can bring about a lot of emotions we don't expect: fear, loss, anxiety, sadness, anger, and despair. It certainly is not a place the Israelites wanted or expected to be. We can hear this really clearly in verse 3: The Israelites said, 'If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.'" They may have been worked to death, used as objects and abused in Egypt, but at least they had one basic need fulfilled: hunger. The Hebrew is really amazing at capturing this expression of anxiety. The word translated as "complain" is *maleeneem* which can literally be translated as: "to murmur". You can even hear this expression in this word if you say it over and over: "maleeeneemmaleeeneem...." It literally sounds like murmuring!

-I think sometimes we can judge the Israelites in the OT too quickly as a “group of complainers”, but think about it..if you were wondering around in this desert with no knowledge of where you are going and starving for food and water wouldn't you murmur too?

-This is where simply “trusting on God” might not cut it. Notice the interchange that happens between God and Moses. Moses doesn't tell Aaron to go say to the Israelites: “Well, just trust in God more and God will provide.” Instead, it is God who first answers and says: “I have heard your calls.” I think this goes to show that in many ways, the complaining here is legitimate. Food is a basic need to survival. Without food, we cannot live. It is true, many people, even some in this room, know what it is like when the next meal is uncertain. Hunger is real. To say “just trust” as a way to tamp down the complaining in this case I think is cheap. Complaining and calling out to God have a real important place that I don't think we lift up enough.

-Dr. Sarah Koenig, associate professor at Seattle Pacific University, argues that “the problem is not that the people murmur or even that the Israelites are disobedient or recalcitrant. The problem is that they don't know God well enough to trust God.” She goes onto say: “This problem is foreshadowed in their song of praise from the previous chapter. They acknowledged that the Lord is a God like no other (Exodus 15:11). They do not fully understand who the Lord is, or what God is able to do. Even if they remember that God is their deliverer, they have not yet experienced again and again that God is also their provider.”

-Now that's a little different take on things. In order to trust someone, we must, in some way, get to know them first.

-It's interesting to look at Aaron's message to the people in response to God's answer with manna. Again, it's not “well folks, just trust in God.” It starts off with “Draw near to the Lord, for God has heard your complaining.” Another way of translating this hebrew word of “draw near” is “come into God's space”. This is an invitation just as much as it is a command or test. Come into my space so I can know you.

-This, of course, poses an interesting question for our time and place. How many of us can do all of the church rituals, sing all the hymns, recite the Lord's Prayer and 10 Commandments, and teach Sunday School, yet have not ventured into God's space to get to know God? Some of us maybe have had intimate experiences where we have gotten to know God upfront in real ways: maybe in surgery or illness. Maybe when a family member has died or our child has been curious about something. Getting to know God is real and it is knowing God that we can then begin to radically trust.

- Maybe our church sign should instead read: “To prepare for today, get to know Christ today!” Trusting is also about knowing.

-Do we know God well enough that we can confidently “murmur” when our own or others’ basic needs are not met? Do we know God well enough to hear the answers to our murmurs today through the noise?

-Cousin’s husband trained to be a paramedic in the fire dept down in a small town in New Mexico. I got to talking with him one time about communicating with someone who is in distress or starting to go into shock. One of things that first responders are trained to do in situations where the person is still conscious is to actually get in their face (3-4 inches from their face) and speak to them. What this does is literally overwhelm all other senses and make it so they have no choice but to tune everything else out except for you who is right in front of them. He was saying in some cases, this can be very effective for calming people down and quickly instilling trust with the paramedics who are caring for them. “Sometimes, you just gotta get in their face so that they know you are there,” he said to me.

-Maybe this is a good way of seeing the Israelites situation too: God getting in their face and saying “I hear you”.

-What if our job here at OSLC wasn’t to put up signs and just blankly say “trust in God”, but to create space for people to see the face of God and allow trust to build? Trusting God is, in my opinion, the only way in which we will be able to make it through some very difficult problems facing our families, our country, and our world. May you see the face of God up close and get to know your creator in new ways so that trust doesn’t just seem like an “add-on”, but a gift. Amen.