

Sermon Transcript

Where's God Asking You To Trust?

Luke 24:48-49 and Acts 7: 54-81, 9:1-19| Sixth Sunday After Pentecost | June 30, 2024 |
John Klawiter, preaching

Grace and peace to you my friends in Christ,

Have you ever put your trust in God? What about during times of danger? When you've been afraid?

Maybe that prayer sounded like "God, I know you're guiding me somewhere, but I'm not sure you've got this one right?"

Imagine you're Saul. How does he feel when his trust in God is challenged? Saul, who we'll start calling Paul, his Greek name, is about to join the fold with the disciples—who two minutes ago were the enemy.

Saul is so convinced that he's got it right with God, that his job is to round up believers in Jesus and imprison them because he believes THEY got it wrong with God.

Saul is so convinced that his understanding of what God wants him to do is right that he's willing to oversee the stoning and death of the deacon Stephen.

Saul has quite the awakening—as he's struck blind and witnesses Jesus on the road.

Jesus asks him to trust God and go to Damascus for further instruction. That must feel like a huge risk. Like something big is happening.

Imagine you're Ananias. You are grieving the death of Stephen, a leader of the church. How does he feel when God tells him to go to talk to someone who had a hand in Stephen's death?

He makes his case that this is a mission not lacking danger. There is risk involved to follow God's instruction.

We cannot discount the deep level of trust that Ananias places in God.

Professor Matt Skinner asks a really interesting question in his **book Acts: Catching up with the Spirit (SLIDE)**.

"If Jesus is powerful enough to generate a bright light, blind Saul, and speak with a disembodied voice, then surely Jesus is also capable of telling Saul directly all the things he told Ananias to tell Saul. Why is Ananias necessary?"

Skinner offers this conclusion:

He's necessary because Saul is not only being brought out of something (his old ways and understanding), but he's also being brought into something (a new identity woven

Sermon Transcript

into the communal existence of Jesus' church). For one thing, NO believer in Damascus, Jerusalem, or anywhere in between is going to trust that Saul has changed.

There's that word again. Trust.

Ananias can help with that. And what's more, Saul's transformation needs to be acknowledged by the people of God as an act of God.

Ananias will be able to testify that Saul is safe. Saul has changed. Jesus has changed him and it's ok to trust Saul. That trust is rewarded—Saul is baptized and his vision restored. The path to belonging is forged.

God trusts us to do hard things.

That trust was put into action this past week as our family was on vacation. The ten of us loaded up our Ford Transit and headed out West.

We got to see these famous faces in my home state (**Mount Rushmore**) and then explored the Rocky Mountains in Colorado before ending up in Utah to see Arches National Park (**pics of family**).

We were in the van. A lot.

On Wednesday, we drove from Boulder, Colorado, directly to Arches where we spent at least three hours stopping at these impressive natural wonders that God made.

The last arch we saw was Sand Dune Arch and the kids enjoyed climbing around and exploring—and honestly, getting out to move around was appreciated by all. (**Sully**)

But it made for a long day.

The plan for Thursday was to go to Canyonlands which is right next to Arches. The Airbnb we stayed in was on the southern end of Moab, down the valley, then back up.

The whole crew was wiped out, but excited to have a day which wouldn't involve so much driving, knowing that Friday and Saturday would be the long trek back home.

As everyone got ready on Thursday morning, Taryn and I talked about Oliver, our son in a wheelchair. We've traveled near and far with him over the years and we know how he responds to these long trips.

Taryn wondered aloud if he wouldn't benefit from a rest day—especially since Canyonlands would involve more hiking to see the sights than the previous day when the parking lots were relatively close to each arch we saw.

Sermon Transcript

We made a plan. Taryn and the other 7 kids would go to Canyonlands in the morning and then come home for a relaxing afternoon and then we'd pack the van to leave early on Friday.

Oliver really appreciated the rest and I got updates of the adventures throughout the day (**picture of kids**), like this one from Dead Horse Point. And this one of Sully meditating (**Sully**)

But then, things took an unexpected turn.

A storm was on the way and Taryn had all the kids loaded up, planning to complete the 45 minute drive from Canyonlands back to the house.

But they didn't get home in 45 minutes.

Shortly after 3 in the afternoon, a flash flood warning blared on my phone. A bellowing rumble of thunder filled the air.

I looked out the window and saw a giant wall of red dust barreling through the valley. The gusts of wind were 60 mph and blowing over everything in its way.

Then, the rains came. A storm of Noah-like proportions beat down upon the land.

This was not good. I wasn't hearing from the van. I paced. I prayed, asking God to protect them.

When I heard from the adventurers, they were sitting ducks. I could hear the hail pelting the van and the kids were worried the windshield would break. They were worried the rocks would fall off the large cliffs alongside the shoulder.

That giant red wall of wind had almost knocked the van over. Taryn had hoped to beat the worst of the storm and get back home, but those flash flood warnings were explicit—get to higher ground! Coming home would mean driving down into the valley.

She stopped on the side of the road as the storm raged. Someone online posted this video of what it was like to drive through the valley to try to beat the storm (**VIDEO then image of storm**)

Taryn figures that this was someone only a few cars ahead of her, but instead of following, she covered her eyes and asked for guidance.

Going through it, like this Tesla, was not going to work—the van would've washed out.

The kids were scared. Taryn told them to pray—and so they did. And she finally received an answer—as the phone blared another flash flood warning, she whipped a U-turn to get out of the valley and find higher ground.

Thank God she did.

They backtracked and found shelter. When it was safe to get back on the road, however, it was another 3 hours before they made it home. The mudslides and debris blocked the roads.

When they made it back to the spot where the van had first pulled over, that entire area was under water and the mud would have submerged the van and they wouldn't have been able to move.

Finally, when they all got home and were safe, the stories rushed out. Their faces looked like they'd seen a ghost. They thought they were going to die. No exaggeration. They weren't sure if they would be saved.

Back in the house, I felt helpless with Oli. I prayed that they would be safe and that I'd hear from them soon. I trusted that they'd be ok, but there was nothing I could do. We were grateful Oliver wasn't in that storm—that would've created a whole new level of anxiety.

In the van, their prayers were answered through the blaring flash flood warnings on the phones that made it clear waiting in the valley was not safe. Their prayer for an answer led them back into the storm, but away from the mudslides and floodwaters. When Taryn said to pray, the kids knew "this is serious!" Those prayers also helped calm a tense and terrifying situation.

I think about how scary it was and how much we talk about trusting God in church or in Sunday school, but for my kids especially, this was a memorable event they'll talk about forever. They'll remember that feeling and they'll remember their mom's quick thinking to get them to safety. This was faith in action.

Stories like we read in the Bible with Saul and Ananias hit at the importance of that trust (**Trust in God**).

I'm certain they both felt anxious and afraid. But they probably also felt curious. What IS God up to here? Where is God leading?

Those questions asked back then are just as applicable to us today, if not more. What is God up to in your life? Where is God asking you to trust, even when you're not confident in the way?

What does it look like to trust God in our relationships?

Having God in the center of our lives, in our relationships with others, means that we're living differently. We trust that we can be vulnerable, we can be honest, we can show emotions and care for each other.



Sermon Transcript

With God we trust that, even in the hardest times, we are never alone. We can always trust in that. Amen.