

## **Trust in God**

Rev. John Allen

A professor of mine in Seminary told this story from early in his career in ministry.

One Sunday, early in his ministry they came to the passing of the peace in the service, a moment where everyone moved around and greeted one another. In this congregation, like in ours, the passing of the peace was not a cursory moment, rather, people really walked around to say hello to a lot of folks.

So my professor, who was the pastor in this congregation, was back up front, looking to move forward with the service. He started talking, but the congregation did not quiet down right away.

In the back there was a little boy, standing on his pew, craning his neck, then jumping up and down to see over the heads of the adults milling around him. He was trying to get his attention back on the pastor. Back on what was happening in the front of the room.

He was getting frustrated. And finally he yelled loud enough for everyone in the sanctuary to hear.

"Would you sit down. I can't see God!"

Most ministers I know have some version of this story. Kind of a "kids say the darnedest things." And of course we grow up, and we grow up to know that the minister is not God.

But almost every minister I know has some version of this story, some version of kids picking up this same confusion. Maybe its the robes?

Including this one, I have four more sermons to offer to you in my time as your pastor.

And I want to offer over this coming month, something of a sermon series. Its not going to really center on a particular theme. But I have chosen four basic topics where I want to share a message that I am taking away from our time together, and that I hope you will too.

The first is this: put your trust in God more than you put your trust in any person.

Or, to say it another way. Don't make the mistake that kid in the back pew made. Not with a pastor, not in politician, not even with those closest to you.

Do not get me wrong. It is good and right for us to find leaders we can trust, and to nurture deep and enduring trust in our most intimate relationships.

It is wonderful to put a lot of trust in people.

But never more than you put in God.

Here is what our Psalm this morning says:

Do not put your trust in princes,  
in mortals, in whom there is no help.  
When their breath departs, they return to the earth;  
on that very day their plans perish.

Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob,  
whose hope is in the Lord their God.

There is not a human being on this planet whom you could put your hope in who would not disappoint you in some way. Some more spectacularly and dramatically than others.

Perhaps some of us know in our lives extraordinary betrayals.

But, all of us know the ordinary disappointments of people not quite living up to what you'd hoped they would be.

Again, this is not to say that we should not try to put our hope in people, or offer ourselves trusting into relationships. It is just to remember that when we do this, we make ourselves vulnerable to feel let down.

But, as the Psalmist says, happy are those whose hope is in their God.

Because, unlike the rest of us, we will not be disappointed if we put our trust in God. We will not be disappointing if we orient our lives toward this much vaster and grace-filled story of love. If we are rooted, grounded, in the truth of God's unfailing love for each of us, then the disappointments of life will not leave us without a ground for hope, without one to trust.

Which is why I say, trust people, hope in people, but never more than God.

In our time together over the past six years, I will observe that we have been at our best when we have been looking together toward what God is calling us to do and to be. When we have allowed ourselves to hope in a future we could not yet quite see, when we have dared to trust that the God who has brought us this far will bring us a step further still.

I remember meetings where we have paused in the middle for prayer, to remind ourselves that we were seeking to discern God's will, not impose our own.

I remember moments where many among you have shared deeply of your own lives with me in person, and testified to how God has carried you through challenges I could scarcely imagine for myself.

I remember moments in worship where I have been able to close my eyes and forget for a moment that I am leading the service, because the space we are creating together feels so well held by God's Spirit.

So this is my first hope for you. As you begin this season of seeking new leadership. Is that you remember that you already have the most important piece of the organizational chart in place.

Everyone who has ever stood where I am standing, and everyone who ever will, will in some way, at some point, disappoint you.

But in the end, the people standing here are trying to point us all toward the one who will not.

Also, as I leave, I want to recommend another one of my favorite paintings to you. The Isenheim Altarpiece, painted by Matthias Grünewald in 1515. You'd have to fly to France to see it, but there are good pictures online.

It was painted for a hospital chapel, at a monastery that specialized in treating skin diseases. The figure of Jesus at the center of the altar piece is depicted as having a skin disease, a beautiful expression through painting to the patients that Christ was with them in their suffering.

Off to one side, is the figure of John the Baptist. And he is standing, just pointing at Jesus. His finger is unnaturally long, and along his finger in small letters is written in Latin: *illum oportet crescere, me autem minui* "He must increase, but I must decrease."

I first became aware of this altar piece because the renowned theologian Karl Barth famously kept a large reproduction of it in his office. He said it reminded him that, at the end of the day, the sole purpose of his work, was to point to Christ.

In the end, that is what all of this is about. The things we do here that count, are the things that point us, and others, toward God. To lift all our eyes out of the pages of our own life's story, even if just for a moment, to know that we are part of something eternal, and to try to help others to see it too.

I am grateful because being a part of this church has helped point me toward the presence of God in ways that have been surprising and enlivening for me. I hope you will keep finding your way of pointing toward the Holy in our midst.

That way, no matter who comes into this place, and no matter how many people are blocking their view of the front.

They'll still be able to see God.