

TEXT: Romans 4:13-25

TOPIC: With Abraham as the example, Paul explains how God works through a journey to fulfill promises.

SUBJECT: The journey of trust is a dynamic of faith that makes viable trusting God for outcomes.

TITLE: The Journey of Trust

When I went to Haiti in 2004 for my seminary immersion, I took a copy of Paul Tillich's *The Dynamics of Faith* along to read. My classmates thought I was nuts; no one reads Tillich on their own initiative – except me.

When I read it, I could literally feel my mind melting from the insights in Tillich's writing. It wasn't as invigorating as the immersion itself, but each was a God thing.

Paul Tillich was a brilliant 20th century theologian. Our immersion professor had been one of Tillich's students when Tillich was alive, so I read the book hoping it would give me insights into how my professor thought. Instead, I came out of the immersion realizing how the journey of trust takes you from poverty to faith. Transitioning from poverty to faith is a journey of trust, and scripture suggests the journey of baptism initiates the journey.

In my experience, the journey of trust requires the type of suffering Jesus predicts in today's gospel lesson because a key of discipleship is about denying ourselves to take up our crosses to follow our Lord. The journey of trust is about being freed from surrendering ourselves to what isn't authentically us to surrendering to how God intends we be. The journey of trust puts God front and center.

PRAYER

In Romans 4:13-25, Paul references Abraham, who is considered the father of Judaism. God called Abraham and Sarah to a journey of trust, promising them that they would be the parents to as many generations as there were stars in the sky, but this promise came when Abraham was as good as dead and Sarah's fertility had left her years earlier.

In order to receive the promise God made, however, Abraham and Sarah had to transition from the poverty of the familiar to a faith of the unfamiliar. By taking this journey of trust, Abraham and Sarah were restored to a life that allowed their son, Isaac, to be born. Neither Abraham nor Sarah chose a path of distrust; instead, they embraced the journey of trust. The journey made it possible for people to trust what God says God's going to do even when it's as clear as mud. The journey of trust takes people from poverty to faith, and from death to new life.

One consistency that has surprised me from the scholars I've read through the years, is how they all suggest that we have the choice of what the trajectory of our lives will be. When we go our own way – and let qualities that keep us stuck be the guiding force – an unwillingness to trust what God is doing is clear. When the journey of trust puts God at the forefront of a life waiting to be discovered, that's when real change happens. I know all the pitfalls of my life have been when I only half-committed to God's plan, but when I put God front and center, God has unfolded journeys like no other. My journey of trust has become my hero's journey. My experience suggests it can be your hero's journey, as well.

Our lives are written partially by the stories we experience and the stories we tell ourselves. Sometimes those stories are actual experiences, but sometimes they are also stories our minds create and those stories can severely limit us. When the story we tell ourselves has those severe limitations, it can be impossible to really trust God, ourselves or others, and where there is no trust, love and empathy become severely limited as well.

God invites us to the journey of trust so God can spring the trap of distrust. When people let God take the lead, they align themselves with a joyfulness first given in their baptism. When people let stories limit or trap them, the journey toward trust is often painful.

For example, in our gospel reading today Peter was limited by who he expected Jesus to be, so when Jesus predicts his death and Peter scolds him, Jesus rebukes Peter because God's plan goes far beyond the limits of Peter's imagination. Did you hear that? *God's plan goes far beyond the limits of Peter's imagination just like God's plan went well beyond the limits of what Abraham and Sarah thought.* If God's plan goes far beyond the limitations of those we read about in scripture, it also must go beyond the limits of our imaginations. In essence, in rebuking Peter, Jesus springs the trap the forces of wickedness attempt to set through Peter – not unlike Jesus' wilderness experience – in preparation for springing the trap of an empty tomb on Easter Sunday. God waits to do the same thing for us.

Personally, I think Peter's rebuking of Jesus and the struggle of trusting God for the journey God invites us to take are one and the same. I think that's why we often see one group of people blame another for the problems of the day. For instance, anytime privileged groups of people blame unprivileged groups of people for everything imaginable under the sun, it's a way of either avoiding the journey of trust or a way of trying to control it out of the fearfulness of it.

The journey of trust means accepting whatever God has in mind; it means trusting that God knows what you're waiting for. The journey of trust takes you from the wilderness of your baptism into the complete mystery of light and life and everything God's intended for you and for us. In my experience, the journey of trust means discovering that the framework for life is

designed by God, and it's there so I can give others – not my best – but God's best in me. It means discovering who I am not in my eyes, but in God's, and then embarking on a hero's journey of trust that lays ahead. The journey of trust has also given me direction where my life has, at times, felt directionless; that's God's doing, not mine.

Just like God had this in mind for Abraham and Sarah and God had it in mind for me, God is also ready to reveal your journey of trust to you. Don't be surprised if it's a little bit unnerving at first because what God has in mind is your resurrection to a life of meaning filled with love and light.

The journey of trust is something God gives all of us in God's time. So, let me wrap this up by leaving you with a few questions today: How is God inviting you to get out of the way of yourself, so you can trust the plans God has for you? How is God inviting you to be humble, so you are teachable? And perhaps most importantly: How willing are you to fully commit yourself, so that God takes the lead and fully become who you know you are because those seeds that were planted the day you were born, and are ready to pop through the soil thanks to the waters of your baptism because a new spring awaits.

Let me just suggest a piece of advice: Don't answer these questions on your own; take it from someone who's done that most of his life. Instead, answer the questions together with God because doing so might represent your first steps on your long, beautiful, delightful journey of trust where God lets you be the hero.

In the name of the triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – one God in perfect community. Amen.