

## “A New Creed: Part IV”

Rev. Dr. Dale Skinner

This morning as we continue to make our way through “A New Creed,” we reflect on this rather challenging statement that says, “we trust in God.” It is a challenging statement because we live in a world that is forever presenting us with reasons why we should not trust.

Perhaps you heard the story last week about the woman in Newfoundland who had posted a picture of her winning “Roll Up The Rim” cup to all of her Facebook friends. Within a half an hour of her posting the photo, one of her Facebook friends apparently copied down the winning redemption code off the cup in the photo, went to the Tim Horton’s website and claimed the \$100 gift card! A part of me questions one’s need to post a picture of their winning Tim Horton’s cup on Facebook to begin with, but this woman’s experience is a reminder that we live in a world where trust is not something we should take for granted, nor is it something we should expect from Facebook friends, which really has lowered the bar for friendship if you ask me! But when we consider the headlines from this past week from the Mike Duffy trial to hearing news of athletes testing positive for Performance Enhancing Drugs. These stories are not just matters of guilt and innocence, they are matters of trust.

I believe we can all think of times in our lives when our trust has been violated or when we have violated the trust of others. These experiences compromise our relationships and colour our world. In life it can reach the point where people give up on trust altogether. Recently, I was reading about a survey where people actually thought that it was okay if politicians lied a little, in fact, people seem to expect it. The public trust has been violated to the point that we find ourselves unable to trust the ones we elect to lead us, instead we end up becoming cynical and even expect that they will be dishonest.

The world of advertising is also another place that can violate our trust. How many times have we been advertised a product only to find out that it’s not “as advertised?” I remember that happening even as a kid when I received what I thought was going to be a really cool toys that just never lived up to the expectations the advertisements created. I was left holding bits of broken plastic in my hands. Is it any wonder then that people mute the

commercials when they come on television, or now with Personal Video Recorders and Netflix you can skip the advertisements all together! I guess this is what happens when trust is violated. We make ourselves harder to reach. Put up barriers because we don't want to be let down again. We grow cynical. We can start to shut things, concerns and people out of our lives. It's easier that way. At least we think so.

There are countless individuals in this world who are hesitant to begin new relationships or try new things because they have been betrayed and confidences shaken. We can ask ourselves why bother? To me it's one of the great tragedies of life, when we find ourselves in a place or a moment when we are unable to trust. It is a tragedy because we can start to feel incredibly alone in this world.

You see, as we age and as we wind along life's way if there is something we seem to learn it is how to *not* trust. I mean think about it, as children, we are at our most trusting and are most willing to try new things, make new friends. I actually believe this is what Jesus had in mind when he said that in order to inherit the Kingdom of Heaven we must be like a child. Yet, as we move through life, as we experience "adulthood" something gets in the way of new things -of having a meaningful future- perhaps it is because we have learned how to not trust?

I think that the man Abram, the man who we encounter in our reading from the book of Genesis this morning had lived long enough and had experienced enough in life that he had probably learned to not trust. After all, the text includes the detail that Abram was 75 years old when he left the land of his family in Haran to go to the land that God would show him. Does this mean that Abram was actually 75 years old? We don't know for sure, but we are to appreciate that Abram had been around for a while before he made this journey to a new place. He had a whole other life before he took the leap to trust in God.

This decision by Abram to trust in God at that point in his life is what makes him such a special figure in the Bible. Abram is considered to be the first human of faith. He is the prototype of what it means to learn to trust in God. Yes, we hear stories that precede this in the scriptures that speak of others who had relationships with God, yet Abram is seen as an actual historical figure whose trust in God changes his life and his identity. Abram eventually becomes known as Abraham and is considered to be the father many people of faith in what are now

known as the Abrahamic traditions. Abram faith has given way to the faith of hundreds of millions of people, including us. In Abraham we are called to examine the essence of faith, of a life lived out of faith, a life that is discovered when we are willing to trust, more specifically to trust in God. And trust not in what was but trust in what can and will be.

Yet this trust wasn't instantaneous. This was a trust and a relationship with God that had to grow. It included investment of time that Abram makes even though he is advanced in years. Even though Abram is at a point in his life when his time was short and perhaps all he thought he had left to plan for was his funeral. Yet trust in God, would give his remaining years meaning and purpose and value.

But not just him, since through him God says all nations/peoples will be blessed. It is a blessing for all because it is by faith that we all stand to gain life, to get a life. No matter where or what we are moving out of and in to, trust becomes essential if we are to step forward boldly. Be it moving from home and into university. From one job to the next. From a meaningful career into retirement. From moving out of a divorce into a new life phase. From selling a cherished home to move into assisted living. Or so many other instances, we need to know how to trust in the unknown... how to trust in God, how to trust again. To trust not in what was because that is no more, but in what will be and what is possible when we let God share it with us to be our strength and help.

For this to happen, this relationship with God and trust has to be intentionally nurtured. It takes work. This text today ends with saying that Abram journeyed on in stages. Stages that we see demarcated in our reading today by Abram building altars to God. These altars that were acknowledgements of his growing relationship to God. As he labored to build those altars Abram took the time to remember God's grace and promises. These altars were hopeful expressions of a relationship that was progressing -leading him forward in life. Abram had to trust not only in what was, but to trust in God meant trusting in what would be. Yes, Abram in his adulthood still had his moments of doubt. In the section of Genesis that immediately follows this one, we can read how Abram hadn't really come to trust God fully, but each intentional step with God was an opportunity to grow in a deeper relationship.

Now I can appreciate that we might still ask ourselves “why we should trust God?” Because, quite frankly, it is always easier to tell somebody else to trust God than it is for us to trust God ourselves. Why have this relationship with God, why not just leave it to others? I heard once a story about a little boy who was envying his older brother's new bicycle. Since he wanted a new bicycle too, he went to his big brother and asked him how to get one. Well, his older brother said that he had prayed for this bicycle and he suggested that his little brother start praying for a new bicycle as well. After giving it a little thought, he realized his older brother seemed to have an inside track, so he went to him and said, "Why don't you just give me your bicycle and you can ask God for another one?"

Now to be clear, that story doesn't contain the best theology. God isn't like fairy god-mother who will grant us our every wish. That is just trust in ourselves, we are not trusting in God to know what are true needs are. We are not opening ourselves to the possibilities that God sees for us. But more to the point, if the relationship is to be authentic, we have to trust in God for ourselves and have our own relationship. It's not something someone else can do for us. However, there is a benefit that exists for us and others when we let *our* faith and our ability to trust to serve as an example just as Abram becomes an example. For Christians he serves as a Christ figure, who helps to shape the fullness of what is meant to have this kind of trust. Abram models the kind of faith in God that finds its fullest expression in Christ's own death and resurrection who shows forth the trust that leads to the ultimate transformation of life. We can model this faith too.

It transforms because as we move forward through life's phases and changes and journeys to new places we do not end up in despair. We have one in whom we can trust. I mean, think about your life for a moment, think of how many people you can trust. How many people can you name that you truly trust with things like your deepest darkest secrets without believing that somehow your relationship will be compromised or your confidence violated as a result? I have met many individuals over the years who have had no such person...there has been no one with whom they could share a trust that was unconditional and completely secure. Yet this is what a relationship with God is all about. It is about having a relationship with the one who knows everything about you and you can trust that God still wants to share a life with

you and love you and forgive you and show you the way forward. Because no one knows the value of trust and what it means to us better than God.

The author of 1 John says, "We love because God first loved us." In light of Abram's story I think we can put it another way by saying, "We trust because God first trusted us." It is a trust and a love that comes from God in such a way that it flows through us to other people...just as it did from God to Abraham to his descendants. The Christian writer Annie Dillard, likens it to filling up a cup underneath a waterfall. The water cascades down endlessly and in great abundance, we just need to hold out our cup and let God fill it as we begin again.

Someone who had this sense of trust in God in his life, and this may come as a surprise to you, was Leonard Nimoy. Many of you will remember Nimoy as the man who played Spock in the original Star Trek series. Nimoy was also a man of faith. He was a son of Jewish Ukranian immigrants and grew up in the west end of Boston. It was his faith that Nimoy drew upon when he came up with that now famous greeting that his Spock character used when he made the hand gesture and uttered the words "live long and prosper." You see, this hand gesture that has the four fingers making the shape of a vee, represents the Hebrew letter Shin. Shin is a very important letter in the Scriptures, as it is the first letter in the Hebrew word Shalom, that refers to the peace and wholeness of God. Shin also begins the word Shaddai, which is the name given to God and appears in the scriptures for the first time when Abram receives his final blessing from God and is named Abraham. Shin is also the first letter of the word Shekhinah which refers to God's presence among humans.

Nimoy recalled when was a young boy, sitting in the congregation when they were all expected to close their eyes and bow their heads, while the priests chanted the blessing. They weren't supposed to look, because it was a time when they were called to trust in God's presence moving among them. Yet the young Nimoy, who was so caught up in what he was experiencing in that moment had to sneak a peek and see what was happening. As he looked at the priests, he saw them holding out their hands like this while they were blessing the congregation. Nimoy remembered it as a moment of divine inspiration and a symbol of hope brought into this world and into his life when we trust in God's power. Thus he used the same blessing as the priests and accompanied it with the words, "Live long and prosper." In later

interviews, Nimoy would often chuckle as he reflected on how when Trekkies exchanged this greeting, they were likely unaware they were blessing each other with something that originated in the deeper hope of the life and prosperity that comes through trust in God.

For Nimoy this wasn't just a gimmick. As a man that was always moving forward, reinventing himself, leaving home at an early age to pursue an acting career. A life in show business taught him a great deal about who to trust and who not to trust. But through it all, Nimoy knew to trust God. In a recent book written about Nimoy, I was struck by a quote from a section of a play Nimoy had written that drew upon the letters of Vincent Van Gough. The play was something that Nimoy considered one of his life's greatest joys and achievements. That's quite something when you consider just how much Nimoy achieved in his life as an actor and as a director! Nimoy had performed the one man play countless times and believed that in many ways it was a reflection of himself. Listen to this quote, he says, "I am a man of passions...I am a stranger on the earth, hide not thy commandments from me. There is an old belief, and it is a good belief, that our life is a pilgrim's progress and that we are strangers on earth...The end of our pilgrimage is the entering in our Father's House, where are many mansions, where he has gone before us to prepare a place for us..."

My friends, those are the words of someone who knew what it meant to trust in God. Yes, he had grown and lived with the examples of ones who had gone on before, Abraham, his parents, the priests. But when it came down to it, faith found a home and meaning in his life when he could take this faith and make it his own. And so it is for us, as ones who have inherited this same faith and follow the way of Christ, "Trust in God" is what we do.

Amen.