

“Trust in God When You Don’t Understand”

Psalm 25:1-10, Mark 1:9-15

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Today is the first Sunday of Lent. Lent is a season of forty days, not counting Sundays, which begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Holy Saturday, the evening before Easter. Sundays in Lent are not counted in the forty days because each Sunday represents a "mini-Easter". In the early church, Lent was a time to prepare new converts for baptism. The number forty days represents the time Jesus spent in the wilderness, enduring the temptation of Satan and preparing to begin his ministry. We will follow Jesus’ footsteps remembering, retelling and participating in the story of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as we continue the journey during Lent. I hope we will take this 40-day journey as a great opportunity to get closer to God.

While I was preparing for this year’s Lenten theme, I contemplated an old but beautiful hymn 528, “Nearer, My God to Thee” I found deep spiritual inspiration in this song. “Still all my song shall be, nearer, my God, to thee.” A spiritual question lingers in my mind: “How do we get nearer and closer to God?” Especially the word “closer”. If we are eager to draw closer to God, what spiritual practices do we need in this season of Lent? I put an image of road for the bulletin cover graphic as a symbol of journey. Our journey is not a road trip, but a spiritual journey to get closer to God. Just imagine that we are traveling to find a destination. We may need some guidance, for examples, a good guide, map, compass and transportation. We need to prepare for ourselves for a new journey. In the same way, as we begin our spiritual journey to come nearer to God for the next six Sundays, we need some guidance to reach our destination with some directional signs or guide postings. Each Sunday, we will explore and find a meaningful spiritual key word in the Scripture readings. I invite us all to discover meaningful and spiritual insights to deepen our faith and to enrich our spirituality as we seek and focus toward God.

This morning, I invite us to think about a word, “Trust” in the Old Testament reading. Our Old Testament reading begins with these words, “To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. O my God, in you I trust. Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long.” Trusting God is the basic foundation and covenant in our spiritual life. The Chancel Choir presented a new song, *Psalm 23* and we will sing that song during Lent. Remember a sentence, “Even though I walk through the darkest

valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.” We know that God is real, powerful and miraculous in our lives, but sometimes, we don’t feel God is near us. When we face our spiritual crisis and despair, we need to check in ourselves whether we still put our whole trust in God. Trust is the most powerful way to make us feel secure when we are overwhelmed and shaken by fear and anxiety.

Many psychologists emphasize the importance of establishing basic trust and attachment in our early infant stage with the parents. Sometimes, I curiously observe my second son Joshua’s behavior. He seems to be playing well with his toys or brother when I or Youngjae is near him around 3-5 feet. One day, while I was taking care of him for an hour, I saw he was playing well with his toys. I thought he could have a fun time by himself without me, I sneaked out of his room. But in a second, I quickly realized that he has the third eye! He started crying hard and I had to hold him. He wanted my presence. My wife told me that she doesn’t have any free time even going to restroom for a minute. When she goes to bathroom, Joshua stands at the door and keeps crying until his mommy comes back to him. The baby seems to have separation anxiety at this age. At the same time, he is slowly gaining basic trust and attachment from his parents. I hope that he will be okay and feel secure without parents for a while once he earns full trust like his brother Jacob now. This may apply for our spiritual life.

I believe that Jesus also had to deal with his trust issue and check in with himself and God while he was preparing for his next chapter in his life and ministry. Let’s look at Jesus in the New Testament reading. The New Testament reading describes that the Spirit immediately drove Jesus out into the wilderness and he was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan. Some of us may be curious why Jesus went out to the wilderness and what happened during those 40 days of praying in the wilderness? Maybe Jesus needed some time with God to sort through the major changes happening in his life. Maybe he needed a break from family, friends and his regular routine in order to see God (and himself) more clearly. Maybe he sought more time with God as he searched for direction and answers. Jesus in the wilderness may have imagined betrayal, suffering, or even death on the cross. He needed courage and self-awareness as he prepared for his new ministry, but most of all, Jesus wanted to check in his relationship with God and his full trust in God no matter what would happen to him later.

Let’s revisit Jesus’ spiritual discipline in the wilderness. The Gospel of Matthew gives us more details about Jesus’ temptation. Satan challenged Jesus to command stones to become loaves of bread, ask for God’s almighty power to

rescue him if Jesus throws himself down from the pinnacle of the temple. Lastly, Satan showed off his power to worship him. Temptation is always around us taking its many different masks. Temptation doesn't merely mean high sugar contained in chocolate or juice, but it can be any type of thing to distrust God, cast doubt on God. Satan whispers to Jesus' ears, if your God doesn't satisfy your needs and your preferences, you don't trust God anymore. Satan also whispers to challenge us to turn away from our God if God doesn't make sense to us.

What Jesus learned in his forty days time and prayer in the wilderness was a lesson that God is not an object for our test. In our spiritual life, there are times that we may feel that God wouldn't respond to our desperate situations. There are times that God seems to be absent and silent to our urgent needs. It is all about trust. Trust is the most important element in our spiritual relationship with God. Let's remember that God never leaves us and watches over us. God still loves us and has a plan for us. Sometimes it may be different from our preference. God knows our needs and situations. In God's time, God will make everything beautiful. That's the faith and trust that we need. During Lent, I hope that we find trust in God and realign our lives seeking to live and love as more faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. Amen.