

Jon Hauerwas – December 18, 2016 – A Lesson in Trust  
Psalm 80:1-3, 17-19 and Matthew 1:18-25

In the Irish film, *Waking Ned Devine*, a young boy named Morris is speaking with the local Catholic priest in a small, empty, village church.

Morris turns to the priest and asks, “So, did he come to you, then?”

“Who’s that?” the priest replies.

“Jesus,” says Morris.

“Jesus,” repeats the priest. “Well he did in many ways, yes.”

“But did you see him?” the boy presses.

“Well not exactly, no,” the priest admits.

“But you’re working for him?” goads Morris, beginning to feel as though he has the clergyman on the ropes.

“I am,” the priest counters. “Doing the best I can.”

“Do you get paid for it?” the boy challenges.

“Well it’s more a payment of the, uh, spiritual kind, Morris.”

“Alright,” the boy says, resting his case.

Next, the priest pivots and asks a question of his own. “Do you think that you could ever be drawn to the church, Morris?”

“I don’t think so,” the boy answers. “I don’t think I could work for someone I’d never met, and not get paid for it.”

In our Time for Young Disciples this morning, I tried to help our children understand that there are all kinds of things in which we place our trust. And yet, some of those cannot be seen. I cannot see the molecular mixture of carbon and

oxygen all around me. But, I trust in it for my very survival. Each breath that I take travels to my lungs where it powers the rest of the body. Meanwhile, our world is shaped by gravitational forces, and sound waves, and even the electromagnetic waves which allow us to communicate by cell phone. We know that these things exist. And yet, we cannot typically use the senses that are most readily available to us in order to prove their existence.

This is fascinating, isn't it? That we are willing to trust in so many of these unseen processes that govern the world around us, but when it comes to God... well, we are afraid to say too much, lest we be considered foolish in the eyes of our neighbors.

It's a lot easier, isn't it, to trust our friends, our neighbors, and our spouses than it is to trust in God? Because we hear them speak. We see their actions. We read and interpret their body language. And for all of these reasons, there is no denying our relationship with them. We trust others based upon their history of faithfulness. Their goodness. Their protection of us from danger and harm. Their encouragement and support. Their way of caring for us in the midst of our needs.

Perhaps this is why, when my six-year-old son is considering trying something new, he often asks, “Dad, do you think that I would like it?” He knows how well I know him. And that I only intend for him that which is good. So he trusts me.

“Do you think that I will like it?” is a loaded question, though. I am honored that my son trusts me as much as he does. But, I also don’t want to overly influence his opinions and decisions. After all, experiencing new things and making determinations about one’s own interests and preferences is an important part of maturing into adulthood. Just as part of our spiritual maturity is learning to try new things even without knowing how it will all turn out.

In our second scripture this morning, we learn about a man named Joseph who is engaged to be married to a young woman named Mary. Joseph, we learn, also has a relationship with God. The text says that he is a “righteous man” who does not wish to harm her, even if it appears that she has hurt him deeply.

Soon, Joseph receives a visit from an angel. And being told by an angel in his dream not to abandon his fiancé, Joseph agrees to venture forth with her into an

unknown future. A future where they will carry the awesome burden and responsibility for parenting the Son of God.

I can almost hear Joseph ask, “God, do you think that I will like it? Parenting, that is. And not just any child, but this child. Before I agree to this, God, do you think that I will like it?” It is a loaded question, isn’t it? For often, the best things in life are a challenging mixture of incredible highs, ordinary routines, and stunning disappointments. That’s because the best things in life are typically relational.

Would Joseph enjoy being awoken in the night by a crying baby? Would he enjoy the burden of comforting a boy who has just been insulted by a playmate? And would he enjoy watching his adult son get arrested, and assaulted, and ultimately, killed? Of course, not.

But, would he still think that it was worth it? If Joseph had a choice between parenting this child – the Christ’s child – and having never met him, what do you think that he would choose? Despite the sleepless nights, and the personal taunts, and the unsavory death on the cross, I think that I know the answer. “God, do you think that I will like it?” Well, not always. But, the journey will astound, and amaze, and enrich you in ways that you never before imagined.

In the end, Mary and Joseph trusted in God's presence as if it was as near and as real as their next breath. And though they could see neither this mysterious God nor that next breath, they knew, and believed, and trusted in this reality. That the unseen breath and the unseen God would sustain them every step of the way.

In *Waking Ned Devine*, Morris told the Irish priest that he could not "work for someone (he'd) never met, and not get paid for it." And, friends, if we are willing to admit it, there is something alluring about that small boy's practicality. For we, too, are cautious with our trust and sparing with our devotion. We could just as easily choose a different path.

But, we have been awakened, like Joseph in a dream, to the power and the mystery of the Almighty God. And as we draw near to the side of the manger, and we peer in with curiosity, and interest, and hopefulness, we turn to those around us and ask, "Do you think that I will like him? This Jesus who is coming." When we, and they know too, that there is only one way to find out. It's a lesson in trust. May it be so and all thanks be to God both now and forever. Amen.