

Lent 2, Year C
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Trust is an essential yet variable component in relationships. Trust requires risk, as we can never truly know what lies inside someone else. That is why trust is often earned incrementally, so that we might test someone in little things to know if they are worthy of trust in the bigger things. Not everyone is deserving of our trust, which is why it is wise to heed the words a Russia proverb made famous by Ronald Reagan, **“Trust, but verify.”** We have background checks, credit checks, Google searches, and conversations with people who know people, so that we can attempt to verify whether someone is indeed trustworthy. We also have that inner voice, which we ignore at our own peril. We watch and learn. We listen to our gut. Ultimately, however, we have to make a choice. We may not know if someone is deserving of our trust until we trust. We may also live a very limited life if we do not trust. As Presbyterian minister Frank Crane once observed, **“You may be deceived if you trust too much but you will live in torment if you don’t trust enough.”**

In today’s reading from Genesis, chapter 15 we eavesdrop on a conversation between God and Abram, who must decide once again how

much to trust. There is some significant history between God and Abram. Way back in chapter 12 God came to Abram and said: **“Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great....”** Abram responded with trust, dutifully packing up all his possessions, gathering his family, and heading out toward the unspecified land of which God had spoken. Along the way Abram and his wife Sarai encountered some challenging situations. Ever resourceful, Abram tried passing the attractive Sarai off as his sister rather than his wife, so that he wouldn’t be in danger of being killed for someone else to acquire her as they passed through Egypt. God helped them get out of the awkward situation that created, and once again promised Abram land and children. Abram then went to the rescue of his nephew Lot, who was kidnapped by enemy kings. In response King Melchizedek, the priest of God, blessed Abram. In return Abram offered a tithe of everything he owned to God. Finally, we arrive at chapter 15 and we hear the now familiar refrain of God promising a great reward. Abram asked respectfully but directly, **“O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless...?”** Tick tock, the biological clock was ticking and Abram and Sarai were not getting any

younger. As was his pattern, Abram had a plan in place because he still lacked a child of his own.

On the one hand, we see that Abram trusted God; on the other hand we understand the reason why Abram continued to develop backup plans. God's sense of time and ours do not always coincide. In response to Abram's pointed question God had Abram go outside and look at the night sky and said, **"Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them...So shall your descendants be."** It is a powerful, visual image. We can envision the vast, starry sky Abram saw. The amazing part is what follows: **"And he believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness."**

Abram believed God. Even after several promises, the faithful starts and back peddling alternatives, the loyalty and understandable impatience, Abram believed. Abram believed, not in the intellectual sense of accepting a theory or doctrine, but in the very basic sense of trusting God. Because Abram trusted God, God counted it as righteousness, as being in right relationship. After all, what would be more right in our relationship with God than trust? Abram didn't get a timetable. He didn't get proof. Instead he was given a promise he chose to believe. That is faith. Abram and Sarai

finally did have a son of their own, but not until Abram was 99 years old and had tried a few more alternate plans when God continued to prove slow. Eventually his name was changed to Abraham, which means ***ancestor of a multitude***. But in this pattern of Abram's pivotal moments of trusting, followed by all the moments of failing to trust, and turning to trust again, we can learn something. **Trust is seldom a one and done phenomenon.** Trust is something that we have to begin again with each day, with some days being far easier than others.

Author Parker Palmer once defined the common human tendency to say we believe in God and then act as if everything were up to us as **"functional atheism,"** saying it is the

...belief that ultimate responsibility for everything rests with us. This is the unconscious, unexamined conviction that if anything decent is going to happen here, we are the ones who must make it happen – a conviction held even by people who talk a good game about God.

Abram knew a thing or two about functional atheism, even if he wouldn't have called it that. Chances are that you and I also know this approach also—especially when it appears God is acting slowly, if at all. Fortunately for us, Lent is like spring training for trust. On Ash Wednesday we begin with looking at all the times that we, like Abraham, have failed to trust. Then we turn to God and try again. We choose to engage in practices that

shape us, as habits surely do, so that we purposefully repeat the process of placing our trust in God. Lent gives us 40 days to intentionally engage in the practice of building trust in God. We are asked to look at our lives, especially the parts we have the hardest time turning over, and trust—sometimes little by little, sometimes in great leaps, day by day. In Lent we practice giving God those things over which we have no control anyway, trusting that God will guide us in what we need to do and, we pray, the courage to do it. In this process of giving and trusting we believe we will be reshaped and reclaimed and, eventually, transformed into new life.

Amen