

Trust and Obey

Luke 24:36-49

It was a PR nightmare for Domino's Pizza.

Two employees recorded themselves as they carefully concocted a "special treat" for customers. They ceremoniously dropped pizza toppings on the floor, mashed them around, scraped them up, and daintily arranged them on pizza dough.

They did other things with cheese, sauce, and other pizza toppings. Then, they uploaded their video on YouTube for the world to see.¹

Of course, the outcry was immediate. Domino's Pizza was instantly plunged into the highest damage control alert possible. The two employees, who can only be called "Dumb and Dumber," were fired on the spot. That particular Domino's outlet was closed for a complete sanitation "do-over." But for anyone who saw the video the damage was done.

We joke with our own family about a "five second rule." But when someone outside our own gene pool is fixing the food and not handling our meal according to the highest of food industry standards. . . fughedaboutit.

The entire "you-serve-me" food industry is based on a certain level of trust. We trust those behind the swinging doors to prepare good, healthful, quality food in a safe, clean, sanitized kitchen. Without that trust, we'd all be eating only at home after church this afternoon.

Trust is something that develops over time. And trust can be shattered in a moment.

Ever visit your first semester college student's dorm room? Do you still "trust" all you taught them about cleanliness being next to godliness? Do you trust that all you taught them about being responsible really sank in?

We weave the delicate strand of trust lessons beginning with our youngest children.

Do you "trust" they wash their hands after going to the bathroom?

Do you "trust" they look both ways before crossing the street?

Do you "trust" they say "please" and "thank you" every time?

Do you "trust" their friends, and their friends' parents?

Do you "trust" your teenager's pledge about drugs, alcohol, sex and, these days, social media?

As an adult do you "trust" your co-workers? Can you "trust" that they are supportive, not subversive? Can you trust your assistant isn't really assassinating your reputation?

Trust is what finally enabled that first generation of disciples to take on their new identity as "eye-and-ear witnesses".

The disciples were terrified after the arrest, trial, condemnation, and crucifixion of Jesus. Who wouldn't have been? Their master, Jesus, had been labeled a common criminal, and with two other convicts was executed in the most hideous, humiliating manner the Roman state had devised. After his death Jesus' disciples scurried and scattered, hiding themselves in dark shadows, away from the sight of religious or state authorities.

Then there was the empty tomb. Talk about being stunned. And then reports of a risen Jesus began to surface, which only startled and confused them further. And just when they thought they'd seen and heard it all, suddenly, Jesus stands in their midst,

holding out his hands and feet for inspection, inviting them to poke and prod, calmly asking for a nosh, and then a nibble of some fish. Put yourself in their place.

Luke's text describes it well. Their status was a convergence of opposing emotions: confused, hopeful, despairing, joyful, disbelieving. Or in Luke's exact words, "in their joy they were [still] disbelieving." The disciples stood before the risen Jesus overjoyed, but obtuse and baffled. Their hearts were full. But their heads were empty.

That's when Jesus sat them down and gave them a crash course in "Remedial Discipleship 101." It wasn't until the disciples tune-in to Jesus' "Remedial 101" lecture that their wonderment turns to witnessing.

Only then did they truly listen. Only then did they truly open their hearts and minds to understand the lessons Jesus had already taught them: that the Messiah had "to suffer;" that the Messiah was "to rise from the dead on the third day;" that the Messiah would offer "repentance and forgiveness of sins", and that they, the disciples, were to continue his mission "in his name" (Luke 24:46-47).

No longer were these words strange or unintelligible. For as the disciples opened themselves to the resurrected Lord, and they came to their senses about what they had seen and heard, Jesus' words become the cornerstone of a new mission best summarized in two words: "Trust and Obey."

What does it mean to be a follower of Jesus, to "Trust and Obey."

For some of us "trust" is the harder word. For others "obey" is more difficult. Let's take a look at "obey" first. See if this helps. The English word "obedience" comes from the Latin root "*obaudire*," whose first definition is actually "to give ear, hearken, listen." To be "obedient" at root means "to listen deeply" (hence *audire*, "to hear"). To "obey" literally translates as "deep listening" or "total hearing." Obeying is deep listening.

And obedience as deep listening is not just something between Latin and English. In the Hebrew scripture "to hear" implies "to obey," and to "hear" God's word meant to respond in obedience. So at the heart of obedience is... a hearing heart.

Obedience is a tuned-in harmonic resonance with the essence of that which is heard. Deep listening to the divine leads to resonance with the Spirit of God which issues a change and a transformation.

We hear a lot of different things in our day. But hearing is not the same as listening. Do we listen to God, or simply hear God from time to time? Because if we listen to God, then we obey what we heard, and are transformed as we trust that God, our Father, knows best who we need to become and what we need to be doing in the world.

Which is why "**obedience**" goes hand-in-hand with "**trust**." For some of you this morning, the "trust" word is even harder than the "obey" word. Your "trust" has been betrayed - by a spouse, by a child, by a co-worker, by a friend, by a parent.

You may be surprised to learn that banks weren't always called banks. They used to be called "trust companies." How times have changed with the banking scandals of our day. Elie Wiesel, the holocaust survivor and Pulitzer Prize winning author, lost everything - twice - in his lifetime. Once in the holocaust, and again in 2009 when the Elie Wiesel Foundation lost 50 million dollar because of its trust in Bernie Madoff.

Trust was a particular issue for the disciples in our text this morning. As the disciples stared into the face of their resurrected Lord, they finally knew the joy of trusting in his word. The disciples became "witnessing believers."

The Greek word for “believe” is *pistis*, which has, as its primary meaning, “trust.” To “believe” is not to intellectually assent to something. To believe is to hold something so close to the heart that you trust your life to it.

The disciples’ “belief” is not some intellectual agreement to some imaginative idea of Jesus. Their “belief” is now fully embracing, gratefully leaning on, wholly trusting in, the risen Lord who stands beside them. These doubting disciples were transformed into passionate “Trust and Obeyers.”

And Jesus’ first instructions to his Trusters-and-Obeyers is challenging. Remember now, it’s only the third day after his crucifixion. Passover crowds are still milling about. The lives of the disciples as followers of the executed criminal named Jesus are still in jeopardy.

But Jesus tells them to “stay.” Not “run and hide”, but “stay here in the city” (v.49). Stay in the midst of those who condemned me and crucified me. Stay in this place that is not home and not safe. Stay together, linger, and wait. As they listen to his command, will they trust him enough even though they don’t comprehend?

Jesus’ disciples wanted to scatter like dandelion seeds. But they didn’t. They had made the transition from doubters and debaters to “trusters and obeyers.”

Belief is not, most fundamentally, believing things about God, or getting right thoughts about God, or knowing scripture, or theology, or the proper order of the books of the Bible.

Belief is a trust relationship with God. Trust is a better word than belief to describe what lies at the heart of faith, which has more to do with relationship than with explanation.

Faith is not facts about God. Faith is friendship with God.

In the early 70s, the Mafia, especially in New York City, was washed up and worn out. Then the movie “The Godfather” came out. More than anything else, it was that movie that brought the Mafia back to life.

“The Godfather” movie energized them and told them who they were. They weren’t thugs. They were just like every other ethnic group: trying to get their piece of the Big Apple, trying to make the dream of the American Promised Land come true. And that was the beginning of their comeback.

This morning, many feel like the disciples after Jesus’ crucifixion: washed up, worn down, bummed out creatures. Then Jesus changed everything. It was Jesus’ appearance and assurance that energized them and reminded them of who they were and could be.

This morning, Jesus appears to us in his Word, we who are washed up, worn down, bummed out creatures, energizing us with the mission of who we are and who we can be—if only we “Trust and Obey.”

¹ https://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/16/business/media/16dominos.html?_r=1&ref=business