

WEEK ONE June 13, 2021 Trust me: I have a plan

This past Thursday, our parish staff spent the morning planning the church's calendar for the next year - which is something we've done every summer except last year when the pandemic hit. Calendar planning helps our staff for lots of reasons. But nowadays, planning a year out might seem crazy or foolishly optimistic. I remember last March when the parish was forced to cancel or delay so many things that we'd scheduled and planned for. Now, fifteen months later, things are looking up and we are planning again. But if I'm honest, we're a bit wary about the future. So for the church to plan beyond a few weeks is an act of faith. It's also an act of trust, believing that somehow it will all work out for the best. And I'm going to go out on a limb and guess you know exactly what I'm talking about. Over the past year and a half, maybe your plans got derailed, disrupted or delayed - plans for work or school, plans for travel or celebrations.

How'd it make you feel?

Angry, sad, frustrated - all of the above?

We've all been through it and are still going through it.

We've all found ourselves asking the question:

what can I trust to actually, realistically happen?

And it's not just the pandemic that has shaken our confidence -

it's trust in the government, trust in institutions, even trust in the Church.

A lot of shakiness, uncertainty and doubt - we're all dealing with it.

SCREEN: Trust Me main screen

Today we're beginning a three week message series - a preaching series - titled, Trust Me.

And like this graphic shows, the reason we can struggle to trust is we've all had the experience of people or institutions saying one thing then doing another.

Almost like they had their fingers crossed behind their back.

So let's start this series defining the word 'trust'.

Here's a definition I like which is perfect for where we are headed over these three weeks:

SCREEN: Trust is: a firm belief in the reliability, truth, ability, or strength of someone or something.

A firm belief in the reliability, truth, ability, or strength of someone or something.

Now, let's break this definition down just a bit.

"A firm belief" in someone or something.

So, not shaky, not uncertain, not maybe, or sorta, or "I hope and pray".

No, a firm belief with little room for doubt.

A firm belief that another person or thing is reliable and true -

has the ability or strength to actually do what they say they can.

If you accept this definition, let me ask you:

who in your life do you trust?

Forbes magazine did a survey and found that outside their family, people trust their doctor the most.

Their doctor - more than politicians, celebrities, or even their child's teacher.

For us as believers, we are called to put our trust in God - first and foremost.

And when we do, we call that faith.

The 'someone' for us, we call God or Jesus - not a thing but a person.

See, faith isn't a list of commandments or teachings.

Faith is trust in a person; it's a firm belief in the reliability and strength of God.

I'm not sure every churchgoer gets this.

And part of the reason for that is that at times,

Catholics stressed knowing a lot of things about God,

without stressing the importance of depending on or trusting in God.

But throughout the Bible, we find story after story of God

inviting individuals to put their trust in him.

The authors of today's readings used examples from nature

to paint a picture of what this trust in God looks like.

The prophet Ezekiel heard God say that he would make his Chosen People - the Israelites - a strong and powerful nation.

The image used was of God taking a tender shoot from the top branch of a cedar tree, planting it so it would become a majestic cedar.

God said:

**SCREEN: It shall put forth branches and bear fruit,
and become a majestic cedar.**

**Birds of every kind shall dwell beneath it,
every winged thing in the shade of its boughs.**

Now, I confess I know nothing about planting trees

- I can barely keep a houseplant alive -

but for this to happen the way God described it to Ezekiel, definitely requires faith and trust.

Think of all the things that could keep that tender shoot planted in the ground from becoming a tree:

drought, fire, getting trampled, so many things.

But remember, this is an image about trusting that God would care for and protect his people.

In the Gospel reading we heard today,

Jesus used examples from nature to paint a picture of what the Kingdom of God looks like.

Jesus said:

**SCREEN: it is as if a man were to scatter seed on the land
and would sleep and rise night and day
and through it all the seed would sprout and grow,
he knows not how.**

Or he said, it's like a mustard seed - a really small seed -

that somehow can grow into a plant so large that birds can live in.

What Jesus described sounds pretty close to Ezekiel's picture and is just as mysterious.

The reason I think these are two perfect readings to get us started

for this series is that they teach us that God has a plan.

A plan for all of creation and a personal plan for each individual in creation.

And just like those examples in the bible, God's plan can be mysterious; can even be hard to understand or accept.

But there is a plan - even if we don't see or understand it.

And our goal is to discover God's Plan and embrace it, rather than spend our lives creating our own plans.

SCREEN: My Plan vs God's Plan

Here are some differences between My Plan for life versus God's.

In my plan, life is good - it's easy.

In my plan there is no pain or sacrifice and I don't have to struggle at all.

In my plan life doesn't throw me any curveballs

and no radical changes are demanded of me.

With My Plan, I'm in control - I set the course because I'm in the driver's seat.

Sounds great, doesn't it?

If only life were like that!

Now let me describe God's Plan as I've come to discover it in my life.

Maybe it sounds like your life too.

In God's Plan there are lots of surprises and unknowns.

There are uncertainties, there are doubts and questions and even some occasional pain and suffering.

With God's Plan, God is in control because God sets the course.

To borrow an airplane analogy: God is the pilot and I'm sitting back in coach.

Of course I'd much rather have My Plan - who wouldn't? -

but it's just not realistic or possible.

If you doubt that, just think back over the last year and all your plans.

So I need to let go of my plan and embrace God's plan.

And to do that requires trust.

Trusting that God, the pilot, can safely fly the plane that is My Life.

Here's another bible verse that's recently become one of my favorites:

SCREEN: “For I know well the plans I have in mind for you, plans for your welfare and not for woe, so as to give you a future of hope.” -Jer 29:12

This was God speaking to the Prophet Jeremiah who had been given an incredibly challenging mission.

If you boil this down, it was God saying to Jeremiah:

“Trust me!

Trust that I have a plan for your life.

Trust that I want the best for you.

Stick with me, turn to me and your future will be hopeful.”

And you know what, Jeremiah did stick with God and God got him through.

But it wasn't easy by any stretch.

It entailed pain and suffering - there were moments of doubt and uncertainty.

But through it all, God was with Jeremiah.

We can look at his life now and see that God had a plan.

A plan that included us hearing about his life 25 centuries later,

and know that God is speaking these words to us - to each of us: *trust me.*

So now, I want to suggest a way for you to make an act of trust when it comes to God.

And for some of you, this act may be easy, for some of you, it may be really hard.

If you're someone who knows and believes with all your heart

that God has a plan for your life, here's your act of trust:

this week, I want to encourage you to pray to God asking for the grace to keep embracing God's plan for you rather than fall back into your plan.

That's your act of trust.

If you're someone who believes in God, but aren't sure that God has a specific plan for your life, ask God to show you the next step to take.

Your next step might be to reach out to a family member or friend who needs you, to recommit to prayer or worship or ministry,

maybe step up in your community to make a difference.

Ask God to show you your next step.

And if you are someone who doubts that God exists or even cares about you,

I want to suggest a very specific prayer for you to pray and here it is:

SCREEN: God if you're real, please let me know.

God if you're real, please let me know.

A woman living in NYC some years ago attended church regularly but described herself as a skeptic - unsure if God really existed or cared about her.

And week after week she heard the pastor suggest this simple prayer.

She said, "I couldn't have prayed any other prayer."

God if you're real, please let me know.

If you feel like her - skeptical, questioning, unsure if you can believe in God, pray this prayer as an act of trust.

SCREEN: Trust Me main screen

Please join us next week for week two of our message series

when we will hear some powerful stories of individuals who trusted in God in a moment of crisis.

We know that God is not holding fingers behind his back.

We can trust God - we really can.

God has a plan for each of us.

God wants us to grow into strong believers

who bear fruit for his kingdom. Amen. +