

June 20, 2021 Message

Catherine Brewer

Sermon “God’s Way of Earning Our Trust”

Once again, good morning and welcome! For those of you who may not know me yet, my name is Catherine Brewer; I usually go by “Catie” for short. I accompany Brent Brewer, the guy frequently near the audio/video equipment who has served as an elder and a member of the Buildings and Grounds Committee at FPC. I am also mom to almost-9-year-old Alonzo (his birthday is on Tuesday) and almost-7-year-old Lillian, whom many of you know by their hats and their enthusiastic answers during children’s sermons. On weekdays, I am a faculty member in the Department of Chemical & Materials Engineering at NMSU. Please bear with me if I digress into reaction kinetics, unit conversions, or the advantages of certain pump configurations.

Our topic for today is trust. I’ll be talking about trust in two ways: first, our trust in God’s power, and second, the role of trust in how we share God’s message with others.

During college, my roommate worked her way through school as an emergency medical technician or EMT. She drove the ambulance, performed triage as a first responder, and stabilized patients for their journey to the hospital. Most weekends, she worked the 24-hour shift from Saturday morning to Sunday morning, and I would meet her at the station for the walk home before church. Upon hearing some of her stories and knowing how much she cared about her patients, I once asked her how she could stay calm when everyone around her was worried and upset. Her response surprised me. She said, “Being calm is part of our job. After all, the emergency is over once we arrive.” She continued to explain that EMTs are well trained to know their roles. They are not expected to know everything or solve everything. Rather they complete their procedures to the best of their ability so that the other emergency medicine team members can do their jobs well. The EMTs gather information through their checklist of vitals and questions (Allergies? Medications? Current pain level?). To the outsider, the

apparent lack of urgency in the mundane protocols provides an air of having the situation under control—even if nothing in the situation has really changed yet. The EMTs’ confidence in knowing what to do reassures those present that the doctors and nurses at the hospital will also know what to do and that all will work out.

In our Gospel lesson, we see a similar confidence in Jesus when the squall came up on the lake. The disciples were not panicking from lack of experience with boats or with weather. Many of them were seasoned fishermen and they recognized a dangerous storm. And what was Jesus doing? We read from verse 37:

“A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. ³⁸ But he (Jesus) was in the stern, asleep on the cushion.”

These verses remind me of a scene from the movie, *The Hunt for Red October*. Jack Ryan, an analyst for the CIA, has alerted the US government of a new Russian submarine, the Red October, that has a unique and almost undetectable propulsion system. From his previous research, Jack was also able to deduce that the Russian submarine captain, a man named Marko Ramius, is likely planning to defect, providing an opportunity for the Americans to steal the vessel. After some amount of adventure, Jack and the officers of an American submarine have been able to join Captain Ramius and his officers on the Red October for the hand-off of the ship in exchange for asylum in the United States. The awkward but friendly conversation is interrupted by an attack by a Russian submarine that has orders to sink the Red October rather than let it fall into American hands. The American sonographer has heard that the Russian submarine has fired a torpedo at the Red October. Short on personnel, Jack steps in as helmsmen to steer the ship. Captain Ramius instructs Jack to steer the ship directly into the torpedo’s path. Jack, having written about Ramius’ history of unconventional tactics, does as instructed. As the torpedo closes in, Ramius casually asks Jack about the books Jack has written, as if the two men are getting acquainted over a cup of coffee rather than facing a life-or-death situation. The look of shock—of incredulity—on Jack’s face

during that scene is what I have always imagined that the disciples' faces looked like when they saw Jesus sleeping. How could he be so calm?!

Now for those who are worried, I will not keep you in suspense. The torpedo harmlessly breaks apart upon impact (it had not had enough time to arm since the Red October unexpectedly closed the distance). Jesus successfully rebukes the storm like an expert teacher commanding a classroom.

There are many times in our lives when our relationship with God looks like a boat about to be swamped. Our experiences as “seasoned fishermen” with God’s law and our own consciences tell us that the situation is precarious. When we reach out to Jesus to ask for his help, he points to his empty tomb at Easter just as he indicated the calmed sea to the disciples on the boat. “Why are you afraid?” Jesus has the power to take away the sin that gets between us and God; he showed on the cross that he has the situation under control—we just need to listen for his directions.

That brings us to our other reading, from the 6th chapter of the second of the two letters we have that Paul wrote to the church in Corinth. Dealing with the Corinthians had been difficult for Paul. I imagine that Paul thought about that congregation much in the same way that I have thought about some of my students. I see their abilities and potential, and I am grieved by the choices they make—choices that help neither themselves or anyone else. When I suggest a different path to them or caution about the consequences of their choices, I am met with distrust and resentment as they assume I do not know what I am talking about or that I have ulterior motives.

Paul had spent considerable time (1.5 years) establishing the congregation in Corinth on his second missionary journey. Corinth was a major trade intersection in modern-day Greece, the 4th largest city in the Roman empire at that time, and very wealthy. Corinth was known for its lack of morality and its excesses, and was home to a temple for the worship of Aphrodite. The congregation consisted of talented but

ordinary people, mostly from the working class and including Jews and Gentiles. Prior to writing what we know as 1 Corinthians, Paul had visited in person and sent a letter to address ongoing issues within the congregation. Those efforts had led to little change in behavior. The letter of 1 Corinthians, therefore, was quite harsh and, we learn later, difficult for Paul to write. Before returning to Corinth a third time, Paul met with another apostle, Titus, in Macedonia (the neighboring Roman province). Titus gave Paul the good news that the Corinthians had taken his letter to heart and made efforts to correct the problems. This encouraged Paul greatly. There were, however, some issues that still had to be addressed before Paul's return, thus he wrote the letter we now know as 2 Corinthians.

One such ongoing issue had been opposition to Paul's leadership (and with the opposition to Paul's leadership, opposition to the message Paul proclaimed). Paul (and Timothy and Titus) had been preaching against what the Corinthians were comfortable with (idolatry, sexual immorality, and divisions within the church). Some members of the congregation had tried to discredit Paul. The verses we read in 2 Corinthians Chapter 6 are Paul's attempt to get through to the Corinthians, to convince the Corinthians to listen to him. This was not because Paul was concerned with his own reputation. Rather, he was concerned that, by his words and actions, the Corinthians might trust in the message of the Gospel. Above all, Paul wanted the Corinthians (and any other readers of his letter) to know that we had been estranged from God due to our sin and that God had sent Jesus to pay the debt for our sin so that we could have a restored relationship with God. Right before our reading, Paul had been reminding the Corinthians about that message. We read from Chapter 5, verses 18-20:

¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. ²⁰ So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

Continuing on into Chapter 6, Paul offers examples of his and his fellow apostles' actions to demonstrate to the Corinthians that he speaks in good faith:

³ We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, ⁴ but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, ⁵ beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; ⁶ by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, ⁷ truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; ⁸ in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; ⁹ as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see—we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; ¹⁰ as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

While few of us will face the level of challenges that Paul faced, we too will face distrust and maybe even opposition from those we are trying to reach. There will be those who have not known God's love. There will be those who have been let down by people who claimed to be sharing God's message. There will be those who are so very anxious about life's storms or torpedoes. So, how do we minister to others? How do we stay calm when the world around us is worried and upset? How do we trust God?

First, we recognize that fixing the relationship between God and others is not up to us. Paul's achievements at changing hearts did not come from his abilities alone. God has already taken care of the hardest parts through the work of Jesus. The same Jesus who could sleep through a storm because he knew he had power over the waves. The responsibility for the final outcome rests on more, and stronger, shoulders than our own.

Second, by handing the responsibility for the big picture to God, we can focus on what is right in front of us. We can focus on actions for which we do have the training. We can sit with the lonely, listen to the frustrated, pace

alongside the anxious, and pray for the hurting. We can share our knowledge...and accompany others in the search for answers. We can help meet the everyday needs: the loaf of bread, the glass of water, the borrowed charging cable, the long arm to retrieve something from a top shelf. One more time from the words of Paul:

⁶by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, ⁷truthful speech, and the power of God;

God knows what he is doing—the opportunities (and challenges) placed in your path may be God providing the answer to someone else’s prayer. Listen and trust.

Let us pray, using the words of a hymn I learned as a child:

1 I am trusting Thee, Lord Jesus, Trusting only Thee;
Trusting Thee for full salvation, Great and free.

4 I am trusting Thee to guide me; Thou alone shalt lead,
Ev'ry day and hour supplying All my need.

5 I am trusting Thee for power; Thine can never fail.
Words which Thou Thyself shalt give me Must prevail.

6 I am trusting Thee, Lord Jesus; Never let me fall.
I am trusting Thee forever And for all.

Amen

Words from: <https://hymnary.org/hymn/LSB2006/729>