

Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church
1st Sunday of Thanksgiving, October 10, 2021
(Isaiah 32:16-18, 1 Thessalonians 5:12-24)
“It Begins With a ‘T’” by Rev. Sue Trigger

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET ISAIAH 32:16-18

16 Then justice will dwell in the wilderness,

and righteousness abide in the fruitful field.

17 The effect of righteousness will be peace,

and the result of righteousness, quietness and **trust** forever.

18 My people will abide in a peaceful habitation,

in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places.

THE FIRST LETTER OF PAUL TO THE THESSALONIANS 5:12-24

...we appeal to you, brothers and sisters, to respect those who labor among you, and have charge of you in the Lord and admonish you; ¹³esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. ¹⁴And we urge you, beloved, to admonish the idlers, encourage the faint hearted, help the weak, be patient with all of them. ¹⁵See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. ¹⁶Rejoice always, ¹⁷pray without ceasing, ¹⁸give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. ¹⁹Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰Do not despise the words of prophets, ²¹but test everything; hold fast to what is good; ²²abstain from every form of evil.

²³May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.

Today we begin the Season of Thanks Giving. It is a season that has not become recognized as part of the liturgical calendar, but it has become increasingly popular in Canada and the United States. “Thanksgiving” in the religious sense means much more than pilgrims, turkey and pumpkin pie. It is simply defined as “acknowledging and celebrating God’s goodness.” Many churches have been adding this time into their “liturgical” calendar to help people really focus on “thanksgiving” in a more religious fashion. So that’s what we’re going to do for the next few weeks – we’re going to remind ourselves of God’s goodness, but we’re also going to remind ourselves of what our responses should be to that goodness. Each week we’ll deal with a response that helps spell out the word “thanks.” This week we begin with the letter t. Listen carefully to this story and see if you can figure out what the “t” stands for.

A tourist was traveling in the southwestern United States and was amazed at the beauty of the Grand Canyon. He began taking picture after picture. Soon though, he came too close to the edge of the canyon, lost his footing and plunged over the side, the camera flew out of his hand as he clawed and scratched to save himself. After he went out of sight and just before he fell into the seemingly endless chasm, he encountered a scrubby bush which he desperately grabbed with both hands. Filled with terror, he called out toward heaven, "Is there anyone up there?"

A calm, powerful voice came out of the sky, "Yes, there is."

The tourist pleaded, "Can you help me? Can you help me?"

The calm voice replied, "Yes, I probably can. What is your problem?"

"I fell over the cliff and now I'm dangling in space, holding on to a bush that is about to come loose. Please help me."

The voice from above said, "All right, but first answer this: Do you believe?"

"Yes, yes, I believe."

"Do you have faith?"

"Yes, yes. I have strong faith."

The calm voice said, "Well, in that case, simply let go of the bush and everything will turn out fine."

There was a tense pause, then the tourist yelled, "Is there anyone else up there?"

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You probably already guessed that today's word is "trust." **Trust** is the basis for any good relationship and so it seems very appropriate to examine **trust** in the relationship we have with God. The story about the tourist is a wonderful example of how many of us **trust** God and it would be very easy to talk about how we are supposed to put all of our **trust** in God. But I won't. In all honesty, I doubt there is anything I can say that will convince a person to put his or her **trust** fully in God. That tends to happen when we find ourselves in a position like the man hanging over the canyon – for many of us, we have to be in real trouble and even then it can be difficult. We have a very hard time giving up control of our lives.

Today, I want to talk about another aspect of **trust** – God's **trust** in us. We don't often think in those terms, do we? For years, the Church has taught how sinful people are, how we are always going to come up short, how we never live up to what God wants us to do. We're sinful human beings – sinful, sinful, sinful. I won't deny that human beings consistently let God down or that there is any chance that we can become perfect in the same way Jesus was perfect. I just want us to remember that God trusts us.

That's a risky thing for God to do. If God's goal was simply to have all of us live according to the rules, God could have created a race of puppets that went about their daily lives without any thought of disobeying God. But God didn't. God created us with the ability to choose between right and wrong, and to know what God wants

for this creation. God sent Jesus to remind us of our responsibility in bringing about God's kingdom of peace and justice. And now God waits for us to do our work, trusting that we will eventually do what is needed. We often talk about how God loves us, but George Macdonald, a 19th century pastor, probably put it best when he said, "To be **trusted** is a greater compliment than to be loved."¹

Today's passage from the book of Isaiah speaks about a time when God will empower us to bring about justice and righteousness, which will result in peace, quietness, and **trust** forever. That isn't describing a time when all of these wonderful things just happen as if God waved a giant magic wand over the planet and poof!!! We have a perfect world. It's describing a time when we live just as we've been taught to live by the many prophets and by Jesus, a time when all people are dealt with fairly by each other. It's describing a time when people everywhere share in the bounty of creation. It's describing a time when all people work together for the common good.

Are you beginning to feel a little pressure now? We ought to because it's a big responsibility. Many of us know of Mother Teresa, the Roman Catholic nun who spent many years trying to do all of these things and to do them in the crowded, diseased streets of Calcutta, India. For almost 50 years, Mother Teresa and the rest of her order sought to bring healing and hope to people who had precious little of that in their lives. That kind of work, day in and day out, is difficult. Mother Teresa once said, "I knew God would not give me anything I can't handle. I just wish that he didn't **trust** me so much."

God **trusts** us just as much and waits for us to take part in this mission of bringing about justice and righteousness. It doesn't mean much to a person who is hungry and homeless to be told by a Christian, "Don't worry – God will take care of you," and then walk away and do nothing to help them. God **trusts** us to be his hands in the world.

Tom Tewell likes to share this story about a very smart and very scared little boy named Timmy. Timmy was very afraid of the lightning and the thunder. His mom and dad went into his room during a thunderstorm and said, "Now, Timmy, don't be afraid. God is right here in the room with you."

He said, "Okay, Mommy and Daddy, I won't be afraid."

But then as the mommy and daddy went into their room and started to get ready for bed, the lightning clapped, and the thunder rolled, and Timmy screamed bloody murder. Timmy's daddy and mommy rushed back into his room and said, "Honey, we thought we told you, you don't need to be afraid. God is right here in the room with you."

Timmy said, "Mommy and Daddy, I know God is right here in the room with me, but I need someone with skin on."

¹ George Macdonald (1824-1905)

Someone with skin on. Someone to take the idea of God's promises and put them into flesh and blood action. And guess who that someone is? Just look in a mirror to get an idea. In this Season of Thanksgiving, we need to sit back and examine our lives, to see the many wonderful people in our lives whether they are family or friends or co-workers or the occasional stranger who shows us some kindness when we need it most. Then we need to remember that we can be that person to the people we know and meet. We can be the reality of God's promises.

We thank God best when we begin to live into the **trust** God has shown us. We give our best thanksgiving when we work together to bring about justice and righteousness in our communities. It can be an overwhelming responsibility to consider, that God is waiting almost anxiously for us to be busy in the world. It can also show us how much God loves us and **trusts** us. E. Stanley Jones described it wonderfully when he wrote, "Faith is not merely you holding on to God – it is God holding on to you." We begin this Season of Thanksgiving the same way we begin every day of our lives, holding on to God and to each other. It all begins with **trust**.