

*Romans 12:1-8*  
*15 Pentecost / Proper 16 / Year A*  
*24 August 2008*  
*Preached by the Rev. David Fredrickson*

Who do you trust? Do you trust yourself? How about your best friend, your spouse or your parents or your siblings or your children? Do you trust them? If so, how much? When we were infants we emerged from the womb trusting everyone and everything. We had no choice in the matter. As infants we were helpless to do anything for ourselves. It comes as no surprise that children whose trust is betrayed on an ongoing basis at the earliest age learn that the universe is a very scary, untenable, and unsafe place to be. But even children raised in the best of circumstances are taught that the world by in large in an untrustworthy place.

As I was getting my hair cut the other day the barber was trying to make some small talk with me, so she started telling me about her five-year-old daughter. It turns out that the little girl is quite an extrovert. She really enjoys talking with anybody, anywhere, telling them her name and all about her favorite things. Kelly, her mother, said to me as she was clipping away, “We had to have the conversation about not talking with strangers again. We have that talk quite often.” I said something lame like, “Yea, we all need to have that talk with our kids whether they are shy like my kids or very outgoing like yours.” Small talk with the barber is not my specialty. But all of us who are parents know it is true, we need to teach our children to be very careful around people they don’t know. My parents had that conversation with me forty years ago and Johnna and I have had that conversation with our kids.

But it is also true that something is ultimately lost in that message. The bond of trust between human beings becomes a little more tarnished, a little more strained when we teach our kids, as we should, that not everyone or everything is trustworthy and dependable. Clearly one of the most serious casualties in all the clergy abuse scandals that we have heard about over the past

few years is this loss of trust. I mean as the saying goes, “If you can’t trust a priest, who can you trust?” What gets planted with these seeds is a question that follows us throughout our entire lives; it’s the question that I opened this sermon with, “Who can I really trust?”

In a sense this is the question being asked by Jesus in this morning’s gospel lesson. Jesus asked his disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” In other words, “Do you trust me? Do you trust that I am who I say I am?” It’s probably a good thing that I wasn’t there because I tend to be a bit skeptical. Even after witnessing all that Jesus had done, the healing of the sick, the feeding of the 5000, the calming of storm at sea, the walking on water, the resuscitation of the little girl who had died, the transfiguration, even with all of that I am not sure that I would have made the same profession of faith that Peter made. And I don’t think I am alone. I wonder how many of you would have made that profession having seen all of that. Experience teaches us that by making ourselves vulnerable by trusting another, we can and sometimes do get burned.

When I was doing youth ministry at Trinity Church in Buckingham, Pennsylvania, I had the kids do a trust exercise one night. Perhaps you have done this, but the idea is to have one person stand blindfolded with their arms crossed in front of them while the rest of the group stands behind that person. The blindfolded one is then supposed to fall backwards trusting that the rest of the group will catch her. The one night I did this exercise there was one kid in the group who was not well liked and the kids took it upon themselves not to catch him as he fell and he cracked his head open on the hard ground. I can’t tell you how mad I was with the group that night, but for the two years that I was there after the incident, that kid didn’t forget the betrayal and I am certain that he still hasn’t. He may have forgiven, but I don’t think he has forgotten.

The messages that we receive from our culture, from our parents, from the media and others about trust coupled with the pain of our experience of betrayal push us, I believe, to hold

on pretty tightly to the image we put out there for public consumption. Most of us believe that being self-sufficient is superior to being vulnerable. In fact vulnerability is seen as a weakness in our culture, people should be able to take care of themselves and their own and not have to rely on others to help them through.

And it is this value that makes Paul's message in Romans so difficult for us to hear this morning. "For as in one body, we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another." What a beautiful vision of community and what the church is supposed to be, but what a challenge. As usual, the way of Christ defies the way of the culture and it is good news. Despite all the technology we use today to keep in touch, people are more isolated than ever. There are few places where people can go to form communities of trust, communities where people can share their deepest feelings and their wildest dreams. Even our families are struggling to form these kind of relationships within themselves. We are literally starving for this kind of contact, these kinds of relationships, this kind of trust, for we have been created to live in this kind of community. As the hands, feet, eyes, ears, and mind of Christ in this world; you and I are called to live not as the world expects us to live, but as we were created to live. This is where joy and peace are found.

Yet it is also an enormously risky venture. It takes great courage to live in this kind of community, to trust one another. Because we are all human, it breaks down sometimes and then it makes it just that much more difficult to come back. Some people would call it insane, yet the will of God will never be known to us unless we emerge from that safety zone that we instinctively put up around ourselves and take the risk; unless we join God's community of the

vulnerable, the loving, the searching, for we are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.

This morning, little Noah and little Skyler (will) have come to join us, to join our community. There is nobody more vulnerable than they. These two wonderful infants are counting on us to be Christ to them, to give them everything they need to grow into the full stature of Christ. You say, that is their parents and their godparent's responsibility. Yes that is true, but you and I have an equal stake in their growth; we are equally responsible in helping them find their place in the body of Christ and we can't do that unless we heed Paul's words and join it ourselves.

In Jesus Name; Amen.