

December 15

“Blind Trust”



Luke 2:4-5

4 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David.

5 He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.

Special Music: “Because of Bethlehem” Matthew West

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NOGV5jcu2Oo>

STEPPING INTO TRUST

Donna Krenshaw sat on the park bench across from the recently reburied time capsule in Old City Park. She had just finished her work day at Daisy's Diner and decided that the park would be a good place to help clear her mind and help her think clearly. The air was a little chilly, so she had worn her jacket. Pigeons squabbled around at her feet. They were used to getting fed when people sat down on the park benches. Donna knew this and had brought a couple of pieces of stale bread from the diner that were about to be thrown out anyway. She tore off a few bits and threw them to the birds who greedily grabbed them up and flew off to who knows where. She found herself wishing that they had stuck around. It might have been easier to contemplate her situation out loud to the pigeons, even if they couldn't understand or give her any feedback.

Donna found herself struggling with the decision she was facing. She needed to let Henry Strawberry over at the First National Bank of Parable know soon whether she would accept his gracious offer to finance the cottage for her. It was an extremely generous offer. In many ways, too generous. Being in her current situation had taught her a valuable lesson about trusting people. The people in Parable had been more than kind and gracious, but the people that she had trusted most in her life had broken that trust, which is how she had found herself without any means, and dependent on the kindness of the citizens of Parable in the first place. How does one start trusting again after having lost trust in the people they are closest to?

When she found herself with a broken-down car in a rainstorm in the middle of the night, she discovered she needed to do some soul-searching. If it hadn't been for Katie Callaway and her daughters, there was no telling what might have happened to her. But the Callaways had graciously taken her in, and with Katie's help and the other residents of Parable, she had managed to find at least a way to regain some of her dignity.

But this offer of a place of her own, not just a place to stay, was just too good to be true and Donna found herself a little bit leery. Sometimes, things are just too good to be true, and for several days now, she had been waiting for the other shoe to drop.

Donna had become very fond of Parable and its residents. This was a place where souls could heal, and peace could be found. Her thoughts wandered back to a production of Brigadoon that she had seen many years before. Yes, there always seemed to be a hidden cost to happiness.

And here was Henry Strawberry offering to sell her this fully furnished cottage for next to nothing. What a blessing. And yet, "What am I missing?" Donna thought. Was it a bad thing to just abandon reason, take the offer, and settle down here in Parable, a place where she felt safe and appreciated? Then again, was it a bad thing to look a gift horse in the mouth and try to figure out what the catch was? Was there something in the shadows ready to reach out, grab her, and throw her back to the ground once again? Was there someone in the wings just waiting for the opportunity to pull the rug out from under her feet again, just for the fun of it?

After her husband John had hit her and she had managed to work up the courage to leave, Donna had lost her ability to trust anything good that came her way. She found herself thinking that there were always ulterior motives involved when it came to trusting people. No one was truly genuine. And then she had met Katie and her girls who had taken her in, no questions asked. And they had continued to help her asking nothing in return, even though they had very little to begin with. Their graciousness became a catalyst to help Donna begin to heal and restore her faith in people.

One of the pigeons returned, looking to get a second bite. Donna threw him another piece of bread. He grabbed it up and looked around for any challengers before flying off again. Donna laughed.

She had thought about calling Katie to see if she would help her think things through. But then Donna realized that she was at a junction point, a moment when she was going to have to make this decision on her own. If she took Henry up on his offer, then Parable was where she would choose to plant herself and dig in some roots. That was a difficult choice when she was still in survival mode. But she couldn't keep on relying on everyone else to keep her afloat. At the same time, it might be nice to finally have someplace to call home.

Donna heard laughter in the air and saw the Collins twins, Rachel and Phillip Jr. swinging on the swings at the playground. She hadn't spent much time around children but always felt that she would like to. John had never wanted children. He even hated to be near them and did his best to avoid them. Donna

had given in too easily, but it may have been out of fear that rose to the surface anytime that she disagreed with John.

She fed another wayward pigeon and then heard a small voice behind her. “Can I try?” It was Rachel, and she was holding out her hand hoping to get a bit of bread to feed the birds. “Me too, me too!” Said Phillip Jr., running up to stand beside his sister with his hand open as well. Rachel smiled at them both and gave them each some bread, which they happily threw into the air hoping a pigeon would catch it midflight. Donna couldn’t help but smile

That’s when it struck her. She realized all the little things that she had been missing out on by not being a part of a community, and by not committing to the possibility of doing something more than just surviving every day. She had been living in the desperation of reality, afraid of stepping out on her own, dreading the consequences of straying outside of her cage of fear. There might never be another opportunity. But she was going to move forward and embrace all that life had to offer her, she would have to trust the people trying so hard to help her.

“Hey lady! You want to come swing with us?” Phillip Jr. asked.

“Yes, oh yes! Please come swing with us!” giggled Rachel.

It was at that moment that Donna made up her mind. You can’t live in a past where you dread the future. A person needs to place themselves in a position where there is reason to expect joy in the day, a reason for getting up in the morning, a reason for finding pleasure in the world around them rather than fear what may never come about. It was all about trust.

“Of course, I will come swing with you,” laughed Donna, taking the children’s hands. “But only for a little while. I need to leave soon to make a call to Mr. Strawberry, the banker. I am about to become your new neighbor!”

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One of the hardest things for human beings to do is to put their trust in someone other than themselves. Trust involves letting go of control. And let's be honest, we really don't like it when we are not in control of our environment. Have you ever witnessed or been a part of an argument over who controls the A/C or the radio in an automobile? An even better example might be if you find yourself hanging from a ledge by your fingers and a fireman reaches down to pull you up, but he tells you that you need to let go of one of your hands so he can reach you. Nobody wants to let go of that kind of situation. If we continue to hang on, then we feel somewhat in control, even when we know we can't keep it up for forever. But if we let go, we are choosing to put our lives into someone else's hands. Who do we trust more? Do we trust our own stamina as we continue to hang on, or do we put our trust in that professional rescuer who we know is far stronger and capable than we are?

By nature, we trust ourselves. We believe that we have not only the right but also the obligation to make our own decisions, right or wrong. Everyone else has to earn our trust. The person trying to help us may know more, be stronger,

more confident, and more experienced, but ultimately, it's our skin and we want to have the final say in how we move forward.

Sometimes, it's pride that gets in our way. Sometimes it's ignorance or stupidity. And yes, sometimes we put our trust in people who will let us down, hurt us, fail us, and cause us physical or emotional harm. But if we are honest with ourselves, we can make poor choices about who to put our trust in.

I know so many people who have taken to self-diagnosing their health issues by looking up their symptoms on the internet. And then they get mad when they find out they don't have the bubonic plague, cancer, or some extremely rare disease that even most doctors are unaware of. Instead of being grateful when they find out they are not going to die, they get angry that their internet search led them down the wrong path. Whether you are ready to accept it or not, Google is not a doctor.

And as much as it pains me to say it, there are so many people who will rubber stamp and tattoo on their spirit every word that comes out of their minister's mouth. They allow their relationship with their Creator to be defined by their minister. I don't believe that preachers intentionally mislead people, but if every theologian believed and taught the same thing, we certainly wouldn't have all the different denominations we see today. There are a great number of ministers and theologians who are smarter and more educated than me, but what I share comes from my heart based on my own personal relationship with God and how he works in my life on a daily basis.

Having trust issues is nothing new to the human experience. People have been hurt or have died trusting the wrong people. But please note that people have also been hurt or have died from trusting the right people. People have even been hurt or have died by trusting God. The problem that we face as humans, is that, by nature, we believe that by trusting in God, everything will become wonderful for us. We forget that Paul trusted God with his life and still spent a great deal of time in prison. More than once, he was stoned and left for dead. How do we rectify that with our faith when we believe that those kinds of things shouldn't happen if we put our trust in God? Why do we believe that when we trust in God, our children will never get sick, that we will always be gainfully employed, and that our spouses will always do right by us? That somehow our lives will be better than Job's because God loves us? Trust is hard. Trusting God to make the right decisions for our lives is even harder. Letting go of the wheel and stepping into faith is probably the most difficult thing that we can do. We need to remember that God never called us to comfort. What he called for us to be his servants. And as his servants, we share the Good News of Jesus Christ and take care of his children. And doing so can come at a cost. But that is what is meant when we "die to Christ" and step into the purpose that he has prepared for us.

Joseph was faced with this kind of challenge. Things had been going along swimmingly well for him. He was making a living, had skills as a craftsman, and was engaged to be married to a woman that he was fond of. He trusted God and life was pretty decent for Joseph. And then, a monkey wrench got dropped

into the works. Suddenly, Mary, his betrothed, was pregnant, but not by him. It was hard to believe that God would do that to him. He was looking for some way to get out of the marriage contract without anyone getting hurt or embarrassed. On top of that, he was facing a deadline to make things right. Caesar Augustus had ordered everyone to go to their native towns to be counted and he certainly didn't want to have to drag a pregnant woman along. She would probably be better off staying at home with her family, maybe going into hiding until the baby was born. Surely, his God, whom he trusted, would never put him into this kind of a situation, a situation where it was inevitable that somebody was going to end up with the short end of the stick. Someone was bound to get hurt in all this. He knew that no one would hold it against him if he broke his promise to Mary's father. But if he did, Mary and her family were going to pay a high price of ridicule and embarrassment. Mary might even get stoned as people stood in judgment of her.

Can't you hear Joseph praying out loud? "Well, God, you got me into this mess. I could use a little help finding a win/win for everybody involved. I trusted you and look where that landed me."

Doesn't that sound just like all of us at times? If we wind up in a mess that is not of our doing, we want to blame somebody else. And if we can't find anyone else to blame, then God becomes our scapegoat. Generally, that is because we don't really know all that is happening or what the plan is. We believe that if the plan involves us, then God should share that plan with us. That makes perfect sense to us. That is our hubris showing our dark side. We think that God must

have made a wrong turn, so we grab the steering wheel and try to get ourselves back to where we think we belong. We bring our human solutions to a perceived failure on God's part. Suddenly, we aren't so trusting, are we? It's hard to trust God when we believe that he is making a mess in our lives. We can't see past our own noses, so we are blind to what purpose God has laid out for us. Instead of trusting him to know what he is doing, we whip our handy-dandy toolbox thinking we will just fix it ourselves. Why put our trust into the same God that got us into the situation in the first place?

One would think that God would be angry with Joseph and his attitude, and his lack of trust. But the truth is, God knows us better than we know ourselves. He knows that we are a stiff-necked people. He knows we are stubborn. He knows that we are full of pride, hubris, and arrogance. And he knows that trust doesn't come easy for us. Just look at how many times the Israelites turned their back on God because they felt he wasn't living up to their expectations. After all, if God truly loved them, wouldn't he make things easy for them? Why does life have to be so hard? Why do we have to spend forty years in the desert? Why do I find myself leading a donkey with a pregnant woman who isn't my wife to the hometown of my father? Why does God allow my children to act up in restaurants or at the grocery store? Why do I always come up short in my bank account? Why does my spouse treat me badly? Why doesn't my boss see how hard I work? Why? Why? Why does life have to be so hard?

Parents love their children, but they know that the best thing to help them grow into loving, productive, and gracious adults, isn't about always making life

easy for them. Parenting a two-year-old is totally different from parenting a teenager, which is different from parenting a young adult. Growing into adulthood is hard and it takes guidance and just enough rope for the child to learn as they grow. I see the human race as a child. God's Creation. God's child. And God has parented his Creation as humanity has grown and learned. I also see our current civilization as being about 15 years old in God's eyes, so rebellious and full of ourselves, thinking we know better than our Father. Maybe believing we can just run away from our Heavenly Father and get by on our own is more tangible to us than feeling we are stuck with someone who doesn't understand us. We don't realize that God knows exactly what he is doing, and he often gives us just enough rope to encourage us to realize why we need him so very much. Not all growth is pretty. As a matter of fact, hard lessons can get pretty ugly. They can leave us hurt and battered. But sometimes that is the only way that we can gain insight into the fact that running away from God never really solves any of our problems.

In our story today, Donna faced the same dilemma. She had experienced having her trust broken and was struggling to learn how to trust people again, how to find the right people in her life to trust, to figure out where she needed to be, and where she could best thrive. She needed to be able to move from survival mode into an environment where she could grow. But to do so was going to require trust, trust in people that she didn't know all that well. And yet, these people had gone above and beyond to let her know that she was accepted

and welcome in the community. They had taken care of her at this darkest point of her life and had helped her find her footing again on solid ground.

Joseph had to trust the dream that God sent him telling him the truth of Mary's pregnancy. But, in order to keep the trust, Joseph needed to step into the truth for everyone's sake. That is how he found himself pulling a donkey ridden by Mary, who wasn't even his wife yet and was about to give birth, down a dark road toward Bethlehem, not knowing if there would be a place for them to stay. All because he trusted in the dream that God sent him.

Blind trust comes without validation. It is admitting that someone is more capable than ourselves to help us through our times of trial. It is admitting that we may never know the purpose of what is happening in our lives but also realizing that God has a handle on things and knows what he is doing. He is worthy of our trust because he never fails us. Even if our human perception leads us astray, he has our backs and will use us to further his Kingdom. And yes, sometimes our struggles and trials are a necessary part of moving the Kingdom forward. And knowing that we are a part of that should bring us joy, not trepidation.

The greatest example of blind trust for each of us is to accept the truth that God allowed his son to be sacrificed for redemption from our sins. Jesus was born, he lived among us, died on the cross to save us, and rose again on the third day, defeating death so that we, the children of God, can enter into the glorious presence of our Creator. It is our faith, our blind trust in our salvation, that allows

the Holy Spirit to guide us and keep us following the purpose that God sets before us, even when the way gets difficult or seems impossible.

It is our faith in our Creator, in his son, in his plan that brings purpose to our lives as we serve God's children with love, grace, and humility. Let us continually subject ourselves to God's purpose for our lives and submit to his will. Let us embrace the guiding nature of the Holy Spirit. How awesome it is to be a part of God's plan and to watch his truth unfold before our eyes.

God bless you all!

AMEN

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