

[BLANK] Well, we've got a hot one today, don't we? Just remember all of those days of cold and rain a few months ago - we keep trusting that the seasons will come and go, and, so far, they do. We keep trusting that our church will be there for us, spring, summer, fall, and winter. So far, it manages to do just that, and for that we can be very grateful. The real question, though, is whether we keep trusting in what faith can do in our lives. Do we have the courage to keep trusting that faith really matters, and that faith can provide the healing and hope that we long for in our hearts? Because, just as seasons come and go, so do churches, if they cannot answer the question of how to trust in our faith effectively. Will you pray with me, please. [PRAYER]

[REUNION] As you may have seen on Facebook, I went to my wife June-Ann's family reunion last weekend, with our son Chris. We had a great time in Hyde Park, a neighborhood on the south side of Boston, just a few blocks away from where June-Ann grew up. June-Ann and her family are Bostonians, through and through. If you counted all of her aunts, uncles, and first and second cousins, more than 175 of them live mostly within 30 miles of Boston. Before the reunion we had a service to bury the remains of her aunt Marion, and she was laid to rest with dirt from Fenway Park. I won't ask how they got it, but they got it! June-Ann is so much from Boston, that she thinks that Arlington, the town where Boston's trolley lines end, is western Massachusetts! So to marry me, a guy born in Springfield, well, I may as well have been from Indiana. [BLANK]

In many ways, June-Ann and I are very different people. I am a Methodist, through and through, and she's Roman Catholic, through and through. I grew up in many places, and have family from all over, and she's still the Boston woman from Hyde Park who I married. I am a Red Sox fan who became a Yankees fan in my college years, and June-Ann, well, when your father is a cop pulling details at Fenway Park, you can imagine what our conversations are like sometimes!

Or not. You see, I think that God brought us together, and has kept us together for all these years, because of something bigger than who we are. In spite of our shortcomings as people, we keep trusting one another, as we change, and as life changes. We keep trusting one another, because even though we are, in many ways, very different people, we both have a very deep faith in the God who we love so much. We both believe that the living presence of God changes who we are, and how we are. And we both live out this faith on a daily basis, deeply in love with the God who loves us so very much, and trusting in that love to keep us together, as we grow..

Trusting in God is harder for some people than for others. [DOLLAR] For many years, our nation has put the words "In God we trust" on all of our money. I guess this means that we are supposed to trust our money the way that we trust God. Or something like that. I worry, sometimes, though, that our trust in God as people, and, as a nation, is about as strong as our trust in our bank balances. When things are good in their lives, and God seems to be on our side, it's easy to trust in God. When times are tough, not so much. And for many people, times have been tough for a long time. [BLANK]

As we get ready to celebrate America's Independence Day, I am reminded that

lasting trust does not come from things that go our way, but from putting our trust in God's way. [DECLARATION] When our Declaration of Independence was published on July 4th in 1776, we were in the middle of a great war with England, a war that we were very much in danger of losing. People were dying from starvation and illness all over the American colonies. The hardships were great for trusting in God that doing the right thing was right in and of itself, with no promise for reward. And yet, the people who signed the Declaration put their trust in God as a bond of sacred honor with one another. [BLANK]

People who keep trusting in God, no matter what, make it through the hard times, and rejoice in the love of God in both good times and bad times. In today's Old Testament reading from 2nd Samuel, we hear David's poem that celebrates Israel's king Saul, and Saul's son Jonathan, after they had died in a great battle. Saul had been a very cruel king, as the prophet Samuel had predicted. He tried to kill David several times. And though David had easy opportunities to kill Saul, he didn't. He trusted in God's plan, and did not kill Israel's king, anointed by God. And so, when Saul died, he could honor with a clean heart both the wicked Saul, and also Jonathan, David's best friend. David kept trusting that being righteous, being a person who tried always to love others as God loves us, was always the right thing to do.

Sometimes it takes a long time for us to give up on things that aren't worthy of our deepest trust. In Mark's gospel today, a woman reaches out to trust that just touching the clothes of Jesus, the Son of God, will heal her wound that had been bleeding for twelve years. The bleeding made her ritually unclean in her Jewish traditions, unable to worship God with others. Her social standing, her money, her family - she had lost all of these. None of them brought her any hope. None of them turned out to be worthy of her deepest trust. And yet, there was still something in her heart that trusted God, something that helped her to put aside her bitterness, her misery, her doubts, her self-doubts, and to reach out to this man Jesus, who seemed to be the very source of God's power. And so, much to the amazement of people following Jesus, a person who seemed to be completely unworthy of being in God's presence, was healed deeply by God, because she had abandoned trust in everything but God.

And then, there are those people who thought that they trusted in God, but then realize that their trust had been in themselves and their own culture, and not in the living God, the only trustworthy source of strength and hope. In Mark, Jesus heals the bleeding woman on the way to visit Jairus, a Jewish religious leader. Jairus had a position of power and prestige in his synagogue. Things were great for Jairus - until they weren't. His daughter was sick, and dying. So Jairus begs Jesus to do something to save his daughter. Jairus' approach is completely different from the bleeding woman. He falls down before Jesus in public - he is using his power to demand that Jesus save his daughter! And when his servants tell Jairus that his daughter is dead, he is ready to give up on Jesus. How often is this our own approach to trusting God. Trusting in God is not a command performance for God to do what we want, even in the face of death. It is removing our fears of what a loving God can do with us, and for us, no matter what.

Jesus says to Jairus. “Don’t be afraid; just keep trusting.” Jesus wanted Jairus and his household to put aside their fear of trusting God, an approach that demands that God remove what makes us most afraid of our weakness, instead of always trusting in God’s strength. He invites Jairus, and his family, and the disciples of Jesus into the room with the girl. He shows them that she is not dead at all, but simply sleeping. Fear of losing the child had made people hysterical, and they had not paid attention to how their fears had blinded them to what God was already doing to bring her back to health.

Human power will not keep us trusting in the God of our salvation. Money won’t keep us trusting God, our sense of accomplishment will not keep us trusting God, and even coming to church will not keep us trusting God, if we give up on God the moment that things don’t go our way. It takes a church with a deep and trusting faith in God to keep a church growing. In a world that is filled with false promises, angry threats, easy ways out, and self-pleasing images of who we are, it is only the churches who reach out to the world with deep trust in the living God, and a deep willingness to witness to the enduring power of the living God in their lives, that will survive and thrive. This was true in the time of Jesus. It is still true today. And, through faith, it will be true until the end of time. Put your trust, your full trust, trust that can be the bedrock of your life, in the living God, the God who loves you, who wants to save you and God’s world, from the destruction that comes from our fear of God’s powerful love. God wants to complete your life with goodness, mercy, and joy, through your trust. Bring it in. And then, be safe, be loved, be at peace, forever. Amen.