

**SERMON: "HOW DO WE KNOW AND TRUST GOD?"**  
**TEXTS: OLD TESTAMENT PSALM 111**  
**NEW TESTAMENT HEBREWS 11:1-22**

**April 14, 2024**  
**Churchwide Confirmation – Lesson Two**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

I went into the sanctuary to put my sermon notes in the pulpit

I usually tweak it on Sunday morning and print it then. I trust the printer will work.

There are usually a handful of people in the sanctuary 5-10 minutes before

I saw them, smiled and then realized as I walked back to my study

that they were not sitting in their usual places. Didn't think much more about it

Then when worship started I noticed pretty much the whole congregation

had moved around – the left people were on the right, the right on the left

the front people in the back and the back in front. Even some of the balcony

people were down on the lower level. This was in North Carolina

It was also my first Sunday back in the pulpit after Beth and I got married.

One of the elders stood to make an announcement. He said, "Just as you

and Beth mark a new beginning and make a change in your lives,

we too thought we'd change things up a bit and move around.

Then he paused and added, "We'll be back in our usual spots next week."

Starting today and lasting just through this sermon series on Churchwide Confirmation,

I thought we'd move things around just a bit and just for a short time.

We used the Apostles' Creed, the most well-known of our creeds and confessions

at Easter. We're going to use it throughout this sermon series as well

but we are going to revise it just a bit. Mix in something from the more recent

Brief Statement of Faith. We are adding the phrase "We trust"

So we will say both "I believe" and "We trust."

I like both together. I appreciate what I have often heard as part of officer training

We ask new elders and deacons to share their favorite confession and why

Many answer "The Apostles Creed because it is what I am used to do,

what I have said many times." Another favorite is the Brief Statement

which uses the language of "We trust." I admit I like that language better.

I like that it is plural. Jesus calls us together, to be a community.

And I really like the language of 'trust.' I like it because it (trust) asks,

I'd say demands, more from us. It involves risks. Trust takes risks

Trust is active. It doesn't just think. It believes, then acts of that belief

## BY FAITH

Our New Testament less today is a litany of those who trusted God  
It is list of some of the heroes of the Hebrew Bible who trusted  
who acted on their belief ... who stepped out in faith  
Isn't that what faith is? Faith is trust in action.

**Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.**

The author of the letter to the Hebrews gives us that definition of faith ...  
'The assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen'  
That is how the chapter begins. Then we get example after example  
of people demonstrating that trust, all beginning with the brief intro, "By faith"  
That means someone acted on their belief. They trusted!

See what happens when you trust God! The author gives us lots of examples  
The examples start in Genesis with Abel, Enoch and Noah  
and continue on through the Old Testament. Then on to the gospel accounts  
with the women at the empty tomb, then to the martyrs of the early church  
and still more and more and more

If this were a seminary class on worship leadership and preaching,  
the teacher would offer an over the glasses look and tell her student  
that seventeen plus examples (that is how many there are) is a bit too many.  
Would you like me to walk you through each example, one by one?  
I'll quote just one – the faith of Abraham.

**By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance, and he set out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.**

My favorite part of this example is "and he set out, not knowing where he was going."  
That is a definition of faith worthy of a cross stitch and a nice frame  
Talk about stepping out in faith ... literally  
That is risk taking trust ... trust in the One who leads us

I really, really like that because it is so honest, so humble  
Anybody ever done that? Not know? "No dear, I am not lost.  
I just thought I'd show you the scenic route."  
Faith, trust, doesn't have to know, doesn't have to pretend to know

## TRUSTING IN WHAT?

So, about that confirmation question, trusting in what ... in God's mercy!  
Here is the question – *“Trusting in the gracious mercy of God, do you turn from the ways of sin and renounce evil and its power in the world?”*

That is the phrase that sets the stage for us to step out in faith  
“Trusting in the gracious mercy of God.” Let's be honest  
We don't do a very good job of turning from the ways of sin  
and renouncing evil and its power in the world on our own,  
trusting our own goodness. Self-righteousness is an oxymoron!

I don't think Abraham or any of the other 17 plus examples listed  
did what they did all on their own. They trusted God  
they trusted God enough to not know the way.

They trusted that they would get lost, get off track and sidetracked  
and on the wrong track (so sure it was the right one, so sure they were right)  
A whole lot of the wrong done is done by those assured they were right

The examples of faith listed in Hebrews, the examples we would list  
the people who showed what it means to trust God (Can you name them?)  
They didn't just trust God ... they trusted in the gracious mercy of God

I am reminded of what my mentor, Allen, told me about leading worship  
about the time of confession near the beginning of our worship  
He'd say, “I don't think people confess because we remind them of their sin  
I think they confess because we remind them of God's mercy.”

Trusting in God's mercy allows to get out under the burden of thinking  
we always have to be right and get it right (or pretend as much)  
It gives us the freedom to be real with ourselves, to take risks  
to make and admit our mistakes ... and to learn from them  
It allows us to admit we at times don't know where we are going

Continuing through the question, we've touched on the key words  
There are three of them – trusting is the first, mercy is the second  
And the third in this confirmation question is ‘renounce’  
*“Trusting in the gracious mercy of God, do you turn from  
the ways of sin and renounce evil and its power in the world?”*

Trusting in God's gracious mercy instead of our supposed goodness  
leads not to denouncing, pointing to the specks in ‘their eyes’  
it leads to renouncing, starting with the lumber in our own eyes

Show image of ‘Renounce and Denounce’

## SUMMARY

Big difference between denouncing and renouncing

One is far too easy to do. Lots of denouncing going on in our day and time,  
lots of 'righteous' folks focused on the wrong they see / we see in others  
And to what effect? Is that denouncing drawing people to the church,  
bringing people closer together, closer to God?

Sure seems like all the denouncing done in God's name pushes people away  
rather than draw them in.

Renouncing, now that is a different thing all together

It isn't easier than denouncing. It is harder ... but is far more effective.  
When the church spends its time renouncing its own sin, we do some good.  
We do good when we point to God's mercy instead of pointing fingers.

As we continue to strive to be "A Place for Everyone" we keep learning  
that the church is not a country club for supposed saints  
'Look, how morally upright, even superior, we are!'

The church is a hospital for sinners, people who know we need mercy  
And know (and I mean trust) that God is indeed merciful and gracious

Think about it, the only way we come anywhere close to being "A Place for Everyone"  
is by trusting in the gracious mercies of God and living by faith.