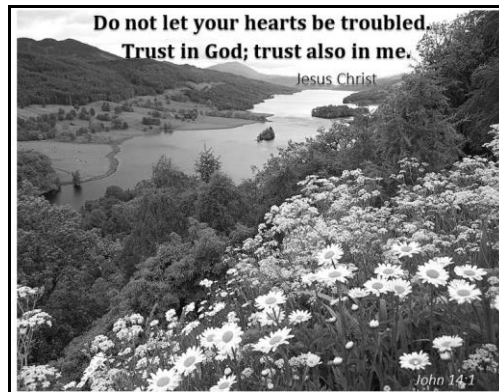


IF ONLY, TRUST



Scripture:

Psalm 130

¹Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD. ²Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications!

³If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand? ⁴But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered.

⁵I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; ⁶my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning.

⁷O Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem. ⁸It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.

John 11:1-45

¹Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ²Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. ³So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." ⁴But when Jesus heard it, he said, "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." ⁵Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, ⁶after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

⁷Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." ⁸The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?" ⁹Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. ¹⁰But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them." ¹¹After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him." ¹²The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right." ¹³Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. ¹⁴Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. ¹⁵For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." ¹⁶Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

¹⁷When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, ¹⁹and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. ²⁰When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. ²¹Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²²But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." ²³Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." ²⁵Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, ²⁶and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

²⁸When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.” ²⁹And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. ³⁰Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. ³²When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” ³³When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. ³⁴He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” ³⁵Jesus began to weep. ³⁶So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” ³⁷But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?” ³⁸Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. ³⁹Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days.” ⁴⁰Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” ⁴¹So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, “Father, I thank you for having heard me. ⁴²I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.” ⁴³When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” ⁴⁴The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.” ⁴⁵Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



IF ONLY, TRUST

Do you have any regrets? Do you often say: “If only I had done this... or if only I had done that?” When you are suffering or caused suffering we tend to say “If only.”

In the book, *The Problem of Pain*, C.S. Lewis said, “Try to exclude the possibility of suffering which the order of nature and the existence of free-wills involve, and you find that you have excluded life itself”

Life is suffering and life is joy, darkness and light, sometimes at the same time like in childbirth. Pain and joy co-exist. God is present. To trust in that presence is to have a happier healthier life. If you believe God is on your side, and God cares for you, that has a huge effect on how you function in life. Science confirms this. We are shaped, by our thoughts. Paul said, “Fix your thoughts on what is true and good and right” (Phil. 4:8) The words *think*, *thought*, and *mind* are used hundreds of times in the Bible. The writer of Proverbs 23:7 states: “As he thinks, so he is” In other words, if you think of God being in and through and around you always, like a loving caring forcefield, then you are practicing the presence of God in a spiritually and physically healthy way.

Look at our banner. It is an inspiring image of hope and faith in God. Isn't it wonderful to see the amazing creativity our church family has

created! The Spirit was definitely present here with us last Sunday as you designed these pieces that represent the things you want to lift up to God during the Lenten Season. One that really stands out here is: TRUST.

Trust is the basis of all healthy relationships. When we lose trust for someone our relationship deteriorates. And that loss of trust can affect your whole life. A child depends on their parents for their basic needs. When their parents fail to keep them safe and provide for their basic needs, then the damage from that lost trust is carried into adult expectations for their friends, the world and our creator God as well. Those who generally have a distrust of people often distrust God, too.

Freud believed that our need to feel protected, provided for, and loved drives us to project onto the universe a belief that in the cosmos there must be a kind and loving father image. When we are not protected, provided for and loved by significant others during our development, then we question the presence or even existence of God. This explains why some people who have low levels of trust are Atheists. People with low self-esteem often question God's existence, too. They feel unworthy and often don't trust God's love for them since they feel less fortunate and less blessed than others. That is a dark feeling.

When you trust that God is merciful and loving, your view of others and of the world tends to be more positive and light, too. That mutual trust enhances your life with belief in a loving presence that helps you cope with hard times, a light in the darkness.

During Martha's time of mourning over the death of her brother, Lazarus, she said to Jesus, "Lord, **if only** you had been here.....my brother would not have died." Even though her brother was already dead, Martha still had hope in Jesus. She turned to him for help.

Both Mary and Martha separately say this to Jesus two times, "**If only you had been here**....That is deep trust, isn't it? They had no doubt that Jesus would have saved Lazarus. So when he showed up too late, why don't they say, ok, don't bother to come with us. Lazarus is already dead, there is nothing you can do. Forget it. All is lost!

Their trust is too deep for that. They don't know what to expect of Jesus now but they trust he will do something. Martha expected Jesus to still do **something**. And so he does. Jesus weeps.

He shows the depth of his love for all of them by joining them in their sorrow. Weeping with someone is one of the most intimate compassionate ways to show your support and empathy. Jesus wept to show God's care for all of humanity even when we suffer. God's has compassionate understanding when we sorrow.

Jesus weeps with us when we are weeping at the bedside of our loved ones in Hospice. Jesus weeps when we discriminate, neglect and offend others. Jesus weeps when we don't take care of the earth. And I'm sure Jesus is weeping today because God's global children are suffering especially in Syria and South Sudan.

5 million South Sudanese people are starving today due to the war and famine. That's like losing all the men, women and children of our Bay area.

I believe God is weeping because war and famine is not God's intention for the world. God set the world in motion and gave us humans the stewardship of the earth. God gave us the purpose to work together to stop violence from ravaging God's creation. And we are to prevent our fragile little blue planet from being warmed

and contaminated beyond habitability. Currently we are losing ground, literally due to global warming. God has a lot to weep about these days.

But the work of God doesn't stop with weeping. In this case with Lazarus, Jesus wept and then called out to Lazarus to rise. He raised him from the dead as a preview to his own resurrection coming up soon. He showed them God's glory and power over death to reassure them that with God, nothing is impossible.

And we can rise, too. We rise every time we answer God's call to build up the kingdom of God with peace, love, and harmony. We rise every time we keep burning the light of hope and don't give up helping those in need.

We rise when we listen and learn sincerely from those who look different or have a non-Christian faith so we can understand our global family better.

High school student from Connecticut, Sarah Harrison, had peace and harmony in mind when she rose up and won Google's doodle contest.



Her winning image was created for the theme: "*What I see for Our Future.*"

Sarah said: "My future is a world where we can all learn to love each other despite our religion, gender, race, ethnicity, or sexuality," Harrison told Google about her design. "I dream of a future where everyone is safe and accepted wherever they go, whoever they are."

(Notice the red headed one has the cross on. We Gingers tend to be Christian as she imagines.)

One of the ways we have been contributing to the rising of God's kingdom of peace here in this place is by reaching out to people of other faiths to foster harmony and understanding through listening and learning. This next Wed. is our last class on *Love Your Muslim Neighbor*. You all have one more chance to learn from our class video and discussion. For our grand finale class two guest speakers will join us to share

what it is like to be Muslim. Our guest speakers: Mo and Aisha both live here in Santa Rosa. They are your Muslim neighbors.

In the course my faith has deepened because as I have learned more about the Muslim faith, I discovered they believe that Jesus will come on judgment day and be a sign of the end times. They also believe Jesus did not die but that God took him straight to heaven from the cross. Even though Islam reveres Mohammed because he is the more recent prophet the Quran contains many stories about Jesus, too, including six miracle stories. One is about the healing the blind man that we read last week. They also believe Jesus had the power of God and could not be touched by Satan.

Isn't that earth shattering? Before the *Love Your Neighbor* classes and the panel discussion last week, I knew Muslims believed that Jesus was an important prophet, but I had no idea Jesus is mentioned so often in the Quran. Go to Google and search Jesus and Islam. I'm looking forward to asking Aisha and Mohammed more about this on Wed. eve.

Deeply listening, learning and trusting promotes harmony within our selves and among the family of God. We all will be better off -- If only -- we trust God is here with us always. God's goodness is at work everywhere, even in the midst of pain and suffering that will continue until the kingdom of God fully reigns on earth as it is in heaven.

This is the movie clip from the *The Shack* that I wanted to show you last week about trusting in God's presence despite the pain we suffer.

(Show video clip from the Shack)

Benediction:

When you wake up at night and you can't sleep because you are fretting about some "If only....." regret in your mind, turn to the scriptures that assure you of God's presence.

I created a handout for you to keep near your bed at night or on your breakfast table in the morning to remind you to trust in God.

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever more. Amen



**Rev. Dr. Cindy Alloway
Presbyterian Church of the Roses
2500 Patio Court
Santa Rosa, CA 95405**