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Trust In God
Genesis 15:6

The biblical writers understood that life is a journey which depends upon relationships of trust. The columnist Kathleen Parker touched on this issue when she wrote about Walter Cronkite soon after his death last summer. She described him in these words:

Walter Cronkite became the most trusted man in television precisely because he seemed so grown up. The CBS anchor was a pillar of maturity, reliability and unemotional accountability... During a bumpy time in our nation's history, he filled a psychic need for order amid chaos. By showing up every night at the same time, same place—speaking simply and without drama—he conveyed a sense that someone was in charge. Our nostalgia for his passing isn't only for the death of a familiar and mostly admired individual, but also for a certain kind of man—an iconic reminder of a time when fathers knew best and the media were on the home team. He had the looks and voice of the sort of man one could trust for good directions. Nonthreatening and, it seemed, untempted by vanity, his prevailing affect was of seriousness and humility. What mattered more than fame or celebrity was content. Cronkite enjoyed fame, but his was a result of his labors in the vineyard. More workhorse than show horse...he brought dignity to news delivery and helped guide...without cynicism or smugness (*The State Journal-Register*, July 22, 2009, page 5).

In the book of Genesis we read about the difficult journey made by Abraham and Sarah and the relationship of trust that sustained them. From the time they left their comfortable home behind, their lives had been a long series of crises and hardships. It would not have been surprising if they had decided at some point to “pack it in.” But they chose to continue the journey because they learned to trust the God who was giving them directions.

In the 15th chapter of Genesis we find Abraham in the grips of anxiety over his situation in life. He has traveled many miles and he is getting very old. Worst of all the children promised by God have not yet come. Because Sarah is beyond childbearing age it seems ridiculous to continue to believe in the possibility of this couple starting a family. Humanly speaking it is impossible. Fearing that he may die without an heir, Abraham begins to make alternative arrangements.

But at that moment when God's promise seems to have collapsed, the Lord intervenes to address the issue of trust. The Lord leads Abraham through a covenant making ceremony. This is the equivalent of a modern contract signing. The cutting of animals in half is to show the fate of the one who breaks the contract. Abraham assumes that God is asking him to reaffirm his faith. But to his surprise it is God who signs the dotted line. It is God who promises to love and care for Abraham and Sarah and their family. The journey does not depend on the strength of Abraham's faith or the smoothness of the road ahead. This journey makes sense because Abraham can place his trust in God.

In Luke's gospel we read that Jesus came to a similar moment in his journey. Luke tells us that Jesus had set his face to Jerusalem. Everything that Jesus says or does through nine chapters of the

gospel can be understood in terms of his destination. For Jerusalem is where he will be received by cheering crowds. Jerusalem is where he will die at the hands of Roman soldiers who are just doing their jobs.

But in the 13th chapter the journey is interrupted by disturbing news. Some Pharisees come to Jesus to do him a favor, which is interesting considering the fact that Jesus is often in conflict with the Pharisees. They have come to tell Jesus that his life is in danger. They have learned that Herod has decided that it is time to take care of Jesus the same way he took care of John the Baptist. Recognizing that Jesus is a serious threat to his authority, Herod has decided to have Jesus eliminated. Despite their differences with Jesus, the Pharisees cannot support a plot to assassinate him.

Implicit in the Pharisees' warning is a call to Jesus to give up his public ministry. It is no longer safe for him to go around preaching and healing before crowds which may include assassins. The Pharisees are saying, "The pain and risk of your journey are too great. Now is the time to be realistic about your goals and pull back. Faith in God is fine but it offers no protection against a death squad."

At this moment, Jesus' journey seems to be at the same dead-end that confronted Abraham and Sarah when they were too old to have children. Humanly speaking it is impossible to continue. The circumstances are far too threatening.

But Jesus refuses to be intimidated by Herod. He sends word to Herod that his public ministry will continue until God is ready to bring it to an end. Jesus announces to the Pharisees and to his followers that this ministry belongs to God and does not depend upon what is humanly possible. Jesus knows that even in our worst moments we can trust in God. Jesus understands that the contract of God's love can never be broken. His relationship of trust with God is worth far more than all the wealth and power that Herod and his Roman masters can use against him.

James Autry learned this truth in the course of the most difficult journey of his life. He has written of how he and his wife spent several desperate years seeking help for their severely autistic son. They took him to countless doctors from their home in Iowa to New York City. They tried a psychic healer. They tried horseback therapy with a specialist who used animals to help children with special needs. Finally it was an educator who provided more help than anyone else. When their son began to show great signs of improvement they threw themselves into supporting the public schools. Autry looks back on what they learned from their journey in these words:

With all that we tried, I believe we'll never know what worked and what didn't. Maybe none of it, maybe all of it, but I don't waste time anymore trying to analyze it. I do know that at some point, while chasing after the one big miracle, I finally recognized the real miracle workers and realized that miracles are happening almost every day, one person at a time, one teacher, one friend, one family member, one coach, one music teacher, one parent at a time (Quoted by Agnes W. Norfleet, *Journal for Preachers*, Lent 2010, page 20).

In this family's painful journey it was relationships of trust which made the difference. Taken together these relationships provide so much more than we think is humanly possible. For behind every healing relationship is the God who guides us through our journeys.