

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family

Title: Where Does Your Trust Lie?

Lesson: Jeremiah 17:5-10

⁵ This is what the LORD says: "Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who draws strength from mere flesh and whose heart turns away from the LORD. ⁶ That person will be like a bush in the wastelands; they will not see prosperity when it comes. They will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives. ⁷ "But blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him. ⁸ They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit." ⁹ The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? ¹⁰ "I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward each person according to their conduct, according to what their deeds deserve."

Who or What Do You Trust the Most? Do you have absolute confidence that your trust will never change?

(Slide 1) More than 100 years ago, there was a ship called the Titanic. It became so famous that a movie was made about it. I personally loved the movie and watched it several times. You may remember this scene: "Do you trust me?" "I trust you." "All right. Open your eyes." "I'm flying! Jack!"

At the time, the Titanic was known as "the unsinkable ship." Some newspapers even wrote that "not even God could sink this ship." It was built with the most advanced technology of the time and was celebrated for its luxurious interior.

However, there was a critical issue—there were not enough lifeboats to accommodate all passengers. The possibility of the ship sinking was considered too low to be a concern. The captain and crew, filled with overconfidence, did not slow down but continued sailing at full speed.

Eventually, while traveling from England to New York, the Titanic struck an iceberg in the North Atlantic Ocean. The "unsinkable" ship sank in just 2 hours and 40 minutes, and over 1,500 people lost their lives.

The sinking of the Titanic was a moment when human arrogance and misplaced trust crumbled. People believed absolutely in technology and human capability, yet in the face of nature's power, they were utterly helpless.

We, too, often place our trust in our own abilities, relationships, or human-made systems. However, trust that is not rooted in God can fall apart at any time.

Where does your trust lie? Let me share another story with you.

(Slide 2) Between the late 1990s and 2006, the U.S. economy experienced a huge housing market boom. People rushed to buy homes, believing that housing prices would continue to rise without stopping.

My wife's uncle was a successful real estate broker in California at the time. He witnessed firsthand the rapid growth of the housing market and firmly believed that home prices would never go down. He was not alone—many others thought the same. They believed that investing in real estate was a guaranteed way to make money, even if it required taking financial risks.

Many people took out loans from banks, purchasing one, two, or even three houses. Banks, eager to profit, even extended loans to people with low credit scores. These people who took loans thought: “As long as housing prices keep rising faster than interest rates, I can buy a house now, sell it later, pay off my loan, and still make a profit.” No one doubted that real estate prices would continue to rise.

However, as economic conditions and policies changed, housing prices began to decline. The homes that people had bought at high prices became difficult to sell. Buyers became scarce, and those who had taken out large loans could no longer keep up with their rising interest payments.

As a result, millions of people, countless businesses, and numerous banks failed. One of the largest investment banks in the U.S., Lehman Brothers, went bankrupt, sending the financial market into complete chaos.

Friends, where does your trust lie?

Many people placed absolute faith in money and the economic system, but the end of their story was not a happy one.

Is today any different? What about companies like NVIDIA, Tesla, or Apple?

Many people are now investing in gold, believing it is a safer asset. Since gold is scarce, is it truly different from the Titanic or Lehman Brothers?

Well... I don't think so. Everything in this world, except for God, is limited.

With time, things age, wear out, and eventually disappear. We ourselves are not eternal or perfect. Our hearts change dozens of times a day. Our thoughts and values shift as time passes. Even our bodies transform—from infancy to youth, to

middle age, to old age. Nothing in this world is everlasting. Nothing remains unchanging.

Where does your trust lie?

(Slide 3) Only God's grace and love for us are eternal and unchanging. The Bible says: "Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in Him." (Jeremiah 17:7) God blesses those who trust, rely on, and follow Him. "They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit." (Jeremiah 17:8)

One misunderstanding we must clear up is this:

Even if we believe in Jesus Christ, trust Him, and follow Him, we will still face unexpected difficulties—what the Bible calls "a year of drought" and "heat."

Believing in Jesus does not mean that life will always be easy.

It is totally natural to feel fear when faced with hardships.

But God is with us in every situation and every moment.

He gives us strength, courage, and the ability to keep going so that difficulties do not consume us.

On Tuesday and Wednesday, I had my ordination interview at Pine Lake.

As I mentioned last week, before this interview, I had to complete a significant amount of paperwork. I submitted everything by mid-January, thinking I would have three weeks to prepare.

So, I decided to relax for a bit before preparing. However, unexpectedly, I became sick and was stuck in bed for days.

When I finally recovered and started preparing, I realized time was running out.

I felt overwhelmed, unsure where to begin, and struggled to organize my thoughts. To be honest, I was anxious, nervous, and afraid.

I knew I couldn't prepare on my own, so I prayed:

"Lord, be with me during this time. Help me not to be discouraged by the outcome, but to see this as an opportunity to learn and grow." With only two days left, I did my best to prepare.

On Tuesday morning, as I drove to Pine Lake, I continued praying and organizing my thoughts. I arrived one hour early, making me the first candidate to check in.

Since there was a worship space, I sat quietly and prayed, reflecting on my thoughts.

Then, after about 10 or 20 minutes, something changed—I felt my nervousness and anxiety slowly transform into confidence and anticipation.

Instead of dreading the interview, I eagerly wanted to get started.

Throughout my years serving this parish, I have experienced: Joyful moments, Difficult challenges, Rewarding times, Unfair situations, Conflicts and misunderstandings. But even in my struggles, God was with me. He gave me the strength to keep serving, courage to keep going, and hope to move forward.

During the interview, as I honestly shared my experiences of God’s grace and guidance, I saw the interviewers nodding in agreement. At that time, I realized that every single experience in my ministry—both the joyful and the difficult ones—was precious. Not only the good moments but also the challenging and painful ones had played a vital role in shaping me, training me, and helping me grow as a pastor.

Then, on Friday afternoon, while visiting some church members, I received a phone call from La Crosse. It was Pastor Jessica, one of my interviewers. She said: “I have great news for you! The Board has decided to recommend you for ordination at this year’s Annual Conference. Congratulations!”

Looking back, I can say with confidence: Even in our darkest moments, God is still working in our lives. Even when our pain and trials seem overwhelming, God is still present. I pray that you will always remember: God is at work in your life, even in the hardest times.

To close, I want to share the poem “The Weaver” by Grant Colfax Tullar, which beautifully illustrates how God is weaving our lives:

(Slide 4-5) My life is but a weaving
Between my Lord and me;
I cannot choose the colors
He worketh steadily.

Not till the loom is silent
And shuttles cease to fly,
Shall God unroll the canvas
And explain the reason why.

Oft times He weaveth sorrow,
And I in foolish pride
Forget He sees the upper,
And I the underside.

The dark threads are as needful
In the Weaver’s skillful hand
As the threads of gold and silver
In the pattern He has planned.