

2 PENTECOST  
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“Now that we have been put right with God through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. He has brought us by faith into this experience of God’s grace in which we now live.” In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

We have Bible study between services most Sundays. We recently have begun a Kerygma Study of the book of Exodus and Biblical Theology. Exodus because it is rich in theology and theology with the idea of deciding what we believe about God and our relationship with Him.

We always surround our study in prayer and with a willingness to learn something new. The importance of prayer is reinforced again and again in the book of Exodus. Although we are just beginning the study of Exodus, our first assignment was to read the entire book for rhythm and reoccurring themes. Prayer is one of those reoccurring themes.

We have also been studying human nature. For Example, early in Exodus when the Pharaoh has issued orders to kill all the male babies born to the Israelites (Or Hebrews as they were then called), the Egyptian mid-wives refused, saying that the Israelite women were not like the Egyptian women. They were having their babies without letting the mid-wives know and so they couldn’t kill the babies. This was, of course, a lie. The truth was they didn’t believe in killing the babies. How about you? Would you lie to save a life? Are there other times in which you would lie?

So what do you believe? Have you been put right with God through faith? I think it’s a good question and one we should ask ourselves from time to time. I was proud of our bishop for getting the clergy together recently and asking how we were physically and spiritually. To me, he was being a good shepherd.

This homily is on what a little bit of what we believe. It’s more academic that I normally do and as a result could get a little heavy so let’s just take a couple of things we say we believe in from the Nicene Creed. I think today I’d like to talk about God being almighty, trust in God, miracles, and church. Jane and I just got back from eight days in Kauai and hopefully church in Hawaii as well as church at Good Shepherd can be illustrative of what we mean when we say we believe in church.

Both the Nicene Creed and the Apostle Creed begin “We believe in God the Father almighty” or I believe in God the Father almighty in the case of the Apostle’s Creed. Tony Guck will tell you that they are very similar to the words used by Buddhists when they make a statement of faith. Buddhists say something like I take refuge in the Buddha. The Buddha is where I belong. The Buddha is what I have confidence in to keep me safe. Aren’t we saying pretty much the same thing about God? A God that is almighty can do anything and everything. And why should we trust Him? Because we know from the Bible, specifically Ephesians and Exodus, that God’s agenda for us is reconciliation, love, and justice. We find ample evidence of God’s good intentions for us in Exodus where we read about God’s compassion for his people in slavery in Egypt and His faithfulness in rescuing them from misery.

To Rowan Williams in his book *Tokens of Trust* almighty suggests that there is nowhere God is absent, powerless or irrelevant. God always has the capacity to do something fresh and different, to bring something new out of a situation. Williams is considered by *Christian Century* to be the most important Protestant theologian in the world. Williams believes that we can trust the maker of heaven and earth precisely because he is the maker of heaven and earth. To Williams, it is because of Jesus that we grasp the idea of a God who is entirely out to promote our life and lasting joy. To him, to the authors of the New Testament and I suspect to you as well, the life of Jesus is key to understanding God’s nature and God’s intentions and as a result our trust and confidence in God.

There are many things that happen in this world that cause some people to not trust and/or not believe in God.

Some examples are: Why did the maker of heaven and earth create a world of earth quakes, tsunamis, hurricanes and other natural disasters? Why some prayers are answered and other are not? Why does God intervene there and not here? Why could Jesus perform miracles? Why could some of the great saints perform miracles – like Elijah, Elisha, Peter, John and Paul? Why couldn't Jesus perform miracles in his home town of Nazareth? We're told in the Gospel of St. Mark that it was because the people were skeptical, but was that the only reason?

In *Tokens of Trust* Williams attempts to answer these questions. He believes:

1. That in a coherent universe, the process of change won't always be smooth or gradual. At certain temperatures, earth quakes occur, volcanoes erupt and ice caps melt. This is a complex creation. Both coherent and fragile, he maintains in explaining natural disasters.
2. That God is always at work in these world processes, but that work is not always visible.
3. Then Williams borrows and further develops St. Augustine's idea that miracles are just natural processes speeded up a bit. In other words, Williams sees God and natural processes working hand in hand in some miracles.
4. That miracles are completely the action of God AND (an important "and") by making room for God in the world by prayer, confidence and receptivity.
5. That unique holiness and intensity of Jesus and to a lesser degree the great saints made miracles more likely.
6. That believing in church is believing in the unique gifts of the other Christians that God has given us to live with. As you will recall, in Paul's letters to Rome and Corinth, he explains that the church is the body of Christ and we are all given spiritual gifts for the benefit of the church and each other and all our gifts are equally important to the overall will of God. To Williams, this is where Christian morality started and he believes that a well functioning Christian Community is one in which everyone is working steadily to release the gifts of others. I think most at Good Shepherd are doing this and because of it, it's a blessing to part of Good Shepherd.
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When Jane and I were in Kauai, we attended a most enjoyable luau. Across the table from us was an Episcopalian couple that had been vacationing at Molokai, a small neighboring island, and attending the Episcopal Church there which they described as the friendliest church they had ever attended. Part of the reason, they thought, was because the vicar had included Hawaiian culture into the service. The doxology and some of the hymns were sung in Hawaiian.

To some extent, "aloha" describes their culture. As you know, aloha is more than a greeting or farewell. Aloha means mutual regard and affection and extends warmth in caring with no obligation in return. Aloha is the essence of relationships in which each person is important to every other person for collective existence. (Sounds like what we say when we say we believe in church) Aloha means to hear what is not said, to see what cannot be seen and to know the unknowable.

How blessed we are to have an almighty, loving God who cares for us and in whom we can trust!

"Now that we have been put right with God through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. He has brought us by faith into this experience of God's grace in which we now live." Amen.