

## Who Can You Trust

Well, this morning I am going to be doing a little trash talking. But I do reassure you that it will be in the UU spirit with love in my heart. But I need to make a few disclaimers and clarifications.

- I am not criticizing the concept of God but the way he or she is portrayed particularly in the Old Testament and the effect that has on the gullibility of Christians.
- The presentation discussion last Sunday was a great segway into my presentation, the discussion on faith and trust being similar or not so similar. For the purposes of my presentation today faith and trust in a religious context are something fundamentally different.
- I should disclose that several of the ideas/concepts came from Mark Twain's *Letters from the Earth*
- Finally in the service last Sunday some of the most intriguing statements came from Janet Ashers comments on bad habits and behaviors. On our trip home from service last Sunday Pat suddenly asked the question. "How can Janet have any bad habits?" I responded, "Well she is Victor's girlfriend; it is really hard to think of her as a bad girl. "But hey you never know. I will not discuss it any further in my presentation but conversing about it during discussion could provide for some interesting conversation.

So here we go.

"In God we trust." Its right there, printed on the back of all our money. Might be the most often printed phrase in the world.

So, in the Old Testament, in the book of Numbers, Moses led the Israelites in a war against the Midianites. The Israelites killed all the men, burned the Midianite settlements, confiscated the livestock, and took captive the women and children. God commanded Moses to kill the boys and women who had sex with men, but to spare the virgin girls. As far as I can tell the virgin girls were sold into sexual slavery. The spoils of war were divided between the leaders, the priests, soldiers, and Yahweh or God. Apparently, God took a share of the loot.

Now the Midianites had been harassing the Israelites for years. You might buy into the Israelites killing the five Midianite Kings and able-bodied men or warriors. But here, the women and particularly the children are innocents. Any person slaughtering innocents like this would be considered a monster. But whether wiping out whole tribes or killing members of their families at God's command, these sages of the Bible get a special dispensation. They are defended by theologians as being in a special place with God. But in all this, God is ultimately responsible. God is all knowing and ultimately responsible for everything.

I like the New Testament much better than the Old Testament. New Testament seems to be where God quits his harsh treatment of man, comes to earth as Jesus and finds love and peace. Even if Jesus is not the son of God, he is the best advocate for social justice in the history of mankind. In an age of barbarism where the poor and meek are exploited and brutalized by the rich and powerful the ideas that the meek will inherit the earth and the poor should be shown charity eventually fosters a cultural shift to a more benevolent world.

In the Old Testament the place of the dead was called Sheol. It was described several different ways. As described eternal torment was not a focus of any of the places. But when God decides to visit earth in the form of Jesus, he brings with him salvation and eternal damnation.

World wide a little less than 5 million children a year die before their fifth birthday. Many of them will not be in a place or have the time to find faith in Jesus Christ. Salvation will not be realized. They will go to hell and be tormented for an eternity.

The Bible is full of direction and myth that strongly suggests the Christian God is not all loving and may not be our ultimate protector. To be clear, reading the Bible has never given me a sense of trust in God. Being raised in the Judeo-Christian culture I am far more familiar with the Christian God. From what I know about other religious communities their scripture suffers with the same contradictions. To me my spirituality should sooth my anxiety about tomorrow. Somehow the Christian concept of God did not.

The Bible kind of frowns on murder, robbery, treachery, oppression, lying to mention a few. Seems like these all apply to us but not God. Can you trust a deity like this to be all loving and have your best interests in mind. Well apparently, you can. Hundreds of millions of Christians do. They have faith that God is all loving and will be their ultimate protector, inspite of all sorts of evidence in the Old Testament to the contrary.

Going down the hierarchy of life I have always trusted my country. Growing up after World War II I watched my country rebuild the devastated world. We were a bastion of democracy venerated by the common man through out the world. We promoted democracy to the point where there were more democracies than dictatorships. Our economy and culture were the envy of the world.

We were not perfect. Our countries foreign adventures have caused a great deal destruction and suffering in other countries. As ludicrous as it may be, like fighting for peace is like screwing for chasity we always went into other countries to save them. Our leaders, although confused at times, seemed to be honorable men and women with good intentions. As much as they may be messing up someone else's life in a country far far away I always trusted them to protect me and treat me fairly. In my local community it seemed most people agreed all should be treated with respect and charity.

I know a bunch of you are asking, in your quiet voice How's that going for you now.

If you are an old white male and you declared bankruptcy five times, you had relations with a porn star while your wife was pregnant, stole classified documents from the government, grabbed the privates of defenseless young women, tried to overthrow an election, and demean women, people of color, the disabled and handicapped, war heroes and anybody that describes you accurately, why would I trust you to be the leader of the free world? Not being a fan of the absurd I would not trust this guy. However, most Christians and especially evangelicals do trust someone like that to be our leader. Nearly 80% of evangelicals voted for a man just like that in the last election.

How can this be??? To me he just does not seem like the guy Jesus would pick. Most evangelicals believe in Creationism and a literal interpretation of the Bible. They believe their God discussed earlier is an all-loving protector of mankind. Given all that, trusting the old white male described above may not be that far of a stretch. The trust they have in him is based on faith, not experience.

In his write up for the front page of our website this month Victor wrote:

“The dictionary tells us that trust is reliance based upon previous experience. We can predict the future based on experience and knowledge. Faith on the other hand is the choice we make to hope for something positive in the absence of evidence. For example, one can have faith that our world will become more peaceful, and people will learn to share resources more equitably, without much evidence that this will happen.”

Trust is a good thing. It must be important. “Trustworthy” is the first point of the 12-point Boy Scout law. It is the “glue” of society. It is an essential part of most personal relationships. Trust promotes political stability, economic growth, social justice, and psychological well-being. Trust or mistrust is based on your experience. Things you can see, hear, smell, touch, and taste. You were conditioned to trust or mistrust by the physical world.

Nietzsche wrote “Faith is not wanting to know what is true.” Pretty cynical if you ask me.

Faith is a good thing. It is a comfort to people in times of distress, uncertainty, and loss. Faith in the right set of morals and values can guide you in an exemplary life. In human relations faith and trust are inner connected. If you have Faith in someone it is usually because you trusted them first due to your observations of their behaviors and your experiences with them.

Religious faith or faith in God is fundamentally different. As Soren Kierkegaard the Danish cleric suggested, religious faith is a personal, passionate, and often paradoxical leap into the unknown, involving trust in something beyond reason, even the absurd, accepting things that seem illogical or impossible. Kierkegaard said “you must have faith in God before you can trust him.”

For many years after World War II news broadcasting and journalism in general were true to the facts. Certain practices and rules of journalism were respected and followed by all major news organizations. In 1949 the Federal Communications Commission introduced the Fairness Doctrine of the United States. For broadcasters the two basic requirements of the policy are some airtimes must be devoted to “controversial matters of public importance.” They were also required to give some, not necessarily equal, time to contrasting views.

In 1987, during the Reagan administration, the FCC abolished the fairness doctrine because many conservative radio stations were required to air rebuttals to their own right-wing editorials. The repeal of the doctrine then allowed yellow journalism to flourish. The digital age put it on steroids.

The term yellow journalism was first used to describe a style of newspaper reporting that emphasized sensationalism over facts.

In 1941, Frank Mott said that there were five things that made up yellow journalism:

1. headlines in huge print that were meant to scare people, often of news that wasn't very important
2. using many pictures or drawings
3. using fake interviews, headlines that did not tell the whole truth, pseudoscience (fake science), and false information from people who said they were experts
4. full-color parts of the newspaper on Sundays, usually with comic strips (which is now normal in the United States)
5. taking the side of the "underdog" against the system.

With the guardrails off broadcasting and journalism in general, conservatives knew they had the tool to push society and American culture to the right. They recognized the anxiety in the working and middle classes. They realized they could build a faith then trust in an America that does not exist.

Through the media Conservatives constructed an alternative world where Immigrants are criminals, liberals traffic small children, government workers are corrupt and laze, a deep state exists that works against the common man, climate change is insignificant etc. All these false claims and accusations repeated, over and over again in the public media with no proof they were true. As with many religious educations, beliefs were repeated until they were held by faith to be true. A conservative media juggernaut is built and an “alternate reality” was created.

For decades now Americas dominance in the world politically, culturally, and economically has diminished. People’s confidence in American exceptionalism has dwindled. Public trust in our institutions and processes has eroded. We no longer enjoy the overwhelming economic and cultural dominance we had after World War II. People are anxious about climate change, the environment, dwindling resources immigration. The world is moving faster, becoming more complicated and less secure.

Many of these issues have developed over the long term. They will not be solved over the short term. Solutions will take at least decades of sacrifice and hard work. Our economic dominance will not return. We did too good of a job using our technology and economic power to build the economies of other nations. There is no evidence that anyone can solve these problems soon.

All this makes many people, especially older Americans anxious. Many people know little about why and how all this is happening. They really do not want it to be that way. They are just waiting for a Messiah to convince them it does not need to be this way; they can make it like it was, they can make it better. They can relieve their anxiety about tomorrow.

The old white previously liberal Messiah saw an opportunity. He realized he could use this “alternate reality” created by conservatives to promote himself to the American Public. As a showman and promoter, he understood if you talk, as a matter of fact, repeat the proposition over and over even if there is no observable evidence or material support and they will believe you. In this media created reality If you can address their anxieties, even with exaggerated claims and half-truths they will have faith in you, they will trust you. It is a trust built on faith.

This is not too dissimilar to the anxiety caused by the inevitability of death and the harshness of life. Most people really do not like the idea of nonexistence. Christians have faith in an outcome for which there is no evidence it ever occurs. They take the paradoxical leap into the unknown to find **the** Messiah and Salvation and relieve their anxiety. This makes them vulnerable to manipulation with the same techniques used to instill their faith.

Proverbs 3.5 “Trust in the Lord with all your heart do not lean on your own understanding.”

Early in the twenty-first century, the number of democracies surged past the tally of authoritarian states worldwide. By 2019, dictatorships outnumbered democracies. Why do they keep rising from the ashes.

Aldos Huxley in a Brave New World stated that people will accept a dictator as long as he does not interfere with their financial security.

Welcome to the age of the new improved dictator. There has been a change in the way dictators operate. Classic dictators of the twentieth century projected fear and terror to control their populations. Dictators like Hitler, Stalin and Mao created single disciplined parties controlling politics and used brutal secret police to control the public and private lives of entire populations. Today the modern dictator does not wear a uniform but wears a suit and goes to conferences with wealthy businessmen and democratic leaders. They are suave manipulators who claim to be champions yet “humble servants of the people” They succeed by successfully manipulating trust.

This is an excerpt from *How Do Dictatorships Survive in the 21st Century?* By the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

*“This new model is based on a brilliant insight. The central goal remains the same: to monopolize political power. But today’s strongmen realize that in current conditions violence is not always necessary or even helpful. Instead of terrorizing citizens, a skillful ruler can control them by reshaping their beliefs about the world. He can fool people into compliance and even enthusiastic approval. In place of harsh repression, the new dictators manipulate information. Like spin doctors in a democracy, they spin the news to engineer support. They are spin dictators.”*

Now not only do I have to worry that God might smite me for saying the wrong words or hanging out with the wrong people, like some kid growing up with his Midianite parents when the Israelites show up. But now, I must worry that the government of my country may do the same thing. I have trusted my country and the people that run it my whole life. The anxiety about what will happen tomorrow has never been mitigated by my faith or a trust in God. Now that anxiety has increased by the loss of trust in my country including my local community. Over 70% of my neighbors voted for the old white guy.

So who can I trust?

Well, my family, friends and this fellowship. It is more important than ever that we value trust as a core principle, emphasizing the inherent worth and dignity of every person, and encourage open and honest communication and relationships built on mutual respect and understanding.”

I am so grateful I belong to a science and rational thought-based fellowship. A place we can commit ourselves to a set of shared values. A place we together can weather the storm that is currently our culture and society. I will close with a to be list. A code of conduct that will help us form strong trusting relationships.

Be TRUSTWORTHY. Tell the truth and keep promises. People can depend on you.

Be LOYAL. Show that you care about your family, friends, Scout leaders, school, and country.

Be HELPFUL. Volunteer to help others without expecting a reward.

Be FRIENDLY. Be a friend to everyone, even people who are very different from you.

Be COURTEOUS. Be polite to everyone and always use good manners.

Be KIND. Treat others as you want to be treated. Never harm or kill any living thing without good reason.

Be OBEDIENT. Follow the rules of your family, school, and pack. Obey the laws of your community and country.

Be CHEERFUL. Look for the bright side of life. Cheerfully do tasks that come your way. Try to help others be happy.

Be THRIFTY. Work to pay your own way. Try not to be wasteful. Use time, food, supplies, and natural resources wisely.

Be BRAVE. Face difficult situations even when you feel afraid. Do what you think is right despite what others might be doing or saying.

Be CLEAN. Keep your body and mind fit. Help keep your home and community clean.

Be REVERENT. Be reverent toward God. Be faithful in your religious duties. Respect the beliefs of others.

For those of you who do not recognize it ,that was the Boy Scout Law. So my advise to all of you is to go forth and be good Boy Scouts.

Quote - Jeanne Harrison Nieuwejarr

God and life are to be trusted – not trusted to shield us from pain and loss and confusion, but trusted to sustain us through such passages, to provide us with all we need to endure till another day. If we can remain open and trusting, if we feel comfortable, we can see that all we need is here.

This was inscribed on the wall of a cellar in Cologne where a number of Jews hid themselves for the entire duration of the war.

I believe in the sun even when it is not shining;  
I believe in love even when feeling it not;  
I believe in God even when he is silent.