



**Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church**  
**Asheville, North Carolina**  
**September 30, 2018**  
**Sermon: "Trust Fall"**  
**Rev. Samantha Gonzalez-Block**

**Numbers 11:4-6, 10-16, 24-29**  
**James 5:13-20**

"Do you solemnly swear to tell the whole truth, nothing but the truth, so help you God?"

"I do."

He sits before the Senate Judiciary Committee in a room full of enthralled spectators. Up until this moment, he has vehemently denied the allegations against him. Today, he has finally agreed to come forward and testify.

"Can I have some water first?" He asks. The chairman nods. He chugs it down.

"I would give anything to reverse the course of my life in the last year" He says with a shaky voice. The past doesn't change for anyone. But at least I can learn from the past. I've learned a lot about life, about myself, and about my responsibilities to others." He clears his throat. "I was involved in a deception. I deceived my friends. I lied to the American people, I lied about what I knew and I lied about what I did not know. In a sense, I was child who refused to admit a fact in hopes that it would go away. And of course, it did not go away. There was only one way out and that was simply to tell the truth."

Although the setting of this scene sounds especially familiar to us this week, it is actually the final moments from one of my all-time favorite films, *Quiz Show*. *Have you seen it?* For those of you who have not, the movie tells the story of a wealthy, privileged budding professor, who gets caught up in a rigged TV Game Show.

The show brings him fortune and fame – the cover of *TIME* magazine and millions of fans – but it also forces him to deceive all those who have admired and loved him. When he is finally found out, he is left with no choice but to trust in the mercy of the American public and to speak difficult truth for all to hear.

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Over the course of past seventy-two hours, we as a nation have been thrown into a political whirlwind that has left us asking questions about what is truth and who can we really trust with it?

This week has felt like both a time of great solidarity and great division. Many among us have been triggered by this week's conversations, we have seen countless heart-wrenching posts on social media, we have opened up about our own difficult experiences, we've engaged in hard

conversations across the dinner table, and we've passionately debated on the bus ride home from school.

This week, we watched as a woman was given no other choice than to trust a broken system - to hurry up and speak her truth before a row of senators, yearning to quickly confirm their choice candidate. We heard her speak about the ways her assault has left her with deep scars that no degree, or therapist, or partner could ever remedy.

We have watched a candidate emotionally deny this woman's experience as truth, and speak about how his life and ambitions have now been ruined by these allegations.

We have watched as our politicians have been so desperate to move forward with a vote, that it took two sexual assault survivors chasing after a senator in an elevator to open up the chance for further investigation. "You are telling women in America that they don't matter," one of them cried, "that they should keep silent, because if they tell the truth, you will ignore them and put whoever you want in power anyway."

*What is going on with us?* It feels like we are a fractured country that has truly forgotten what it means to tenderly trust in one another. We seem unable to hear hard truths spoken: truths can dismantle systems of oppression, shake up the status quo, give voice to the silenced, and promote equity for all God's people across the aisle, across the world.

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As Christians, trust is the core of our faith – and who we trust has never been a matter of debate. "I am the way the truth and the life," says Jesus Christ. The truth we trust is always God's truth, which stands above all else, which is more valuable than any human system or party or opinion.

It is that same truth that connects us to one another in holy community. It calls for us to trust in our siblings in Christ and to make room for one another to be heard and nurtured along the way.

Surely to trust in God and in one another means that we take bold risks together, we reach out to the most marginalized, we commit ourselves to the life-long work of justice, and we courageously invest in the future of the church.

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For the past few weeks here at Grace Covenant, we have been plowing through the epistle of James. At the time it was written, our forefathers and foremothers of the faith were in the midst of their own theological hearing of sorts. They were lost in debate over what it means to truly live as Christ believers. James was speaking into this chaotic moment: trying to unite everyone across lines of division, seeking to provide faithful answers that they all could trust.

For James, living a Christ-centered life means practicing what we preach, being thoughtful about our speech, empowering the most vulnerable among us, living with the greatest of integrity. And

in our passage today, James ends his epistle focused on the practice that unites all others – prayer.

*“Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray.  
Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise.  
Is anyone among you sick?  
Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil.”*

Our text reminds us that being a Christian means we trust in the answers God brings. When we are in pain, when we are filled with joy, when we are ill, we turn to God. When we are seeking solutions, direction, hope, we turn to God. When we feel alone, disappointed, overwhelmed, we turn to God. *And how we do this?* By belting psalms of praise and crying out in heartfelt prayer.

But for James, prayer is not complete when we practice it alone. No, prayer clings most tightly to God’s desire for us, when it is done in holy community.

*“Is anyone among you in trouble? Is anyone among you sick?”*  
James does not ask, “Are you in trouble?”, “Are you sick?”  
He asks, “Is anyone among you? Among you.

In an age when the emerging church was still at odds with itself, James wanted so badly to build a Christian community committed to ‘sacred siblinghood:’ where we can faithfully trust in one another, bear each other’s burdens, share in each other’s joys and sorrows, affirm each other’s identities and perspectives, welcome each other in exactly as we are.

*“Is anyone among you in trouble? Is anyone among you sick?”*  
In other words: How are ya’ll feeling? Are ya’ll well? Are ya’ll hurting?

Looking around the room this morning, I know that we are each facing our own profound struggles, our pain and concern is raw and real, and sometimes it can feel too heavy to carry on our own.

As people of faith, James reminds us that we do not face life’s challenges or questions alone. Christ calls us to lean on one another: to seek out answers and healing together, to recognize the quality of these relationships, and to commit ourselves to each other for the long haul. This is what it means to be faithful siblings in Christ. This is what it means to live as sacred community.

When it seems easier to pull away from one another, when we think our truth is too much for anyone else to handle, when we find ourselves closing our eyes to what is most painful and pressing in our world, God’s voice speaks louder and bolder than ever before. God reminds us of this essential truth: we belong to one another.

And when we fall, we can trust that this family will be there to catch us and lift us back up to standing.

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Last Wednesday, the Guatemala Partnership Committee hosted a public dinner with Dr. Alvis Dunn, a Professor from UNCA who teaches about Guatemalan history.

As we know, Grace Covenant has had a sister church, *Iglesia Jerusalem* for over twenty-three years. Our churches have visited one another nineteen times and this coming November, Kelley Griffith will be going on behalf of our church.

Being sister churches requires an immense amount trust. We share a written covenant where we have committed to praying for each other and finding creative ways to grow closer. We have established prayer partners, supported microloan projects and scholarships, exchanged countless gifts and embraces, we have even formed a joint *Facebook* group.

At last week's dinner and history lesson, the committee was looking forward to learning more about the experiences our sister church members have faced throughout the years. As you can imagine, the history was hard to hear. Guatemala has only been a democracy since 1996. And before then, it had a slew of dictators and was caught up in a thirty-six year-long Civil War.

Right off the bat, I was amazed to hear that Grace Covenant first visited *Iglesia Jerusalem* back in 1995 when the country was still at war (pretty bold!).

But what felt most impactful was when Dr. Alvis Dunn spoke hard truth to us. He said "In 1954, our U.S. government took it upon itself to dismantle the only promising democracy Guatemala had ever seen. We put our own political agenda above the needs of the people. We placed a military man in power, sent down large corporations, armed the military, were the cause of countless lives "disappearing," and we did our best to keep it all hidden from the American public."

Hearing his words reminded me yet again of the great lengths we will go to prevent ourselves from being honest, vulnerable and true. What would it look like if we could really trust one another with our failures? If we could be honest about our shortcomings? If we could ask for forgiveness and desire God's mercy?

Our sister church knows this hard truth about our past and still they seek to trust in us, to welcome us in as fellow siblings in Christ and to engage in ministry together.

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James ends his epistle with a call for us to live as one community in search of God's truth. And if one of us should go astray, James says we should reach out and bring that one back into the fold. His final words speak of our need for each other and the value of the gifts, experiences and stories we each bring to this community.

Speaking truth to one another is hard, exhausting, sometimes even dangerous; but what would it be like if we allowed our church to be worthy of our trust? If we allowed ourselves to be that vulnerable with one another? Imagine where we could go as a community of faith. Imagine all that we could do together.

Today is our Stewardship season kick off and we are reminded that here at Grace Covenant we put our collective trust in Christ, who is stirring and speaking among us – in worship and in Sunday School, in the many programs, councils, groups and services that meet here at 789 Merrimon Avenue, in the work that we are doing to dismantle white supremacy and bring about justice in our city, through the tireless efforts of our thirty-nine ministry partners, in our relationships with churches nearby and abroad, and even in the homes and shelters and living facilities we each occupy. Christ is stirring.

And so, as we consider our 2019 pledges, each of us is being asked to trust what God is doing in and through Grace Covenant. We are being asked to trust in this community, to trust in each other, to trust in God, and to trust in the hard and important work ahead...enough to pool our resources, to pool our time and our talents, to commit ourselves to working together for Christ's justice, and mercy and radical love for all people – no matter the danger, no matter the cost.

James reminds us that we belong to one another.

*Are any among you suffering? Are any among us cheerful? Are any among you ill?*

Here in this community, God invites us into bold trust, into faith, into family, into truth telling.

May we follow God with faithful, ready hearts.

May we clasp our hands together and sing out in harmony louder than ever before.