

Trusting and Trusted
The Reverend Cyndi Simpson
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This month, our worship theme is TRUST. We are going to explore that in several ways. Next week, I'm going to talk about **Truth**, which shares a core root meaning with TRUST. The week after that, I'm going to talk about how white people can come to trust themselves on racial issues. So that white people can be trustworthy for people of color. So that genuine trust can flow both ways. And on the 24th, Tom Peterson is going to share a sermon on how it is that we trust ourselves, which is the ground of our trust of others.

Today I'm going to talk about trust – how it is built and sustained among people. And I'm thinking mostly about how that is done in this congregation, which is a very special kind of group. Not a family. Not a workplace. A religious community. A community where trust is paramount and necessary for our life together.

First, a couple of true stories about trust from the internet.
Mike P writes:

*Mr. W. was my P.E. teacher and basketball coach. When he arrived at my school, I was going into 9th Grade and heavily lacking direction. I was part of a big social group which involved a lot of mischief and I was easily lead into situations that would get me into a lot of trouble. One day, when we were in the fitness room for a session, Mr. W. left the room. Right away, the majority of the boys went into the store room and started stealing small pieces of equipment. I, for some reason, and for the first time, **did not**.*

Upon his return, Mr. W. looked in the storeroom and knew that the room had been entered. He insisted that we all line up at the door so he could search us on our way to the next class. I was sixth in line. As the boys ahead of me left the room, Mr. W. found various items on them and made a note of their names and explained that their parents would be contacted along with the police. When I arrived at the front, Mr. W. simply said, "On you go, Mike. I trust you." Those seven words changed my life. I now coach children of ages ranging from 4 to 19 years old, I'm in my final year of a college degree and have played basketball, rugby and soccer regularly since 9th Grade. Without those seven words I don't know where I would be.

Wendy D. writes a story of trust in the workplace:

*Recently, I messed up and forgot to make a request for an employee's salary change. The employee emailed me about it, oh, 2 months after it should have happened. I immediately apologized and started thinking of excuses as to why it happened. As I got to probably the 3rd excuse (only in my head), I realized that excuses were the wrong way to approach this. He asked to meet with me. I invited him over and apologized again. I told him that I could probably come up with a dozen excuses or reasons why I forgot, but that the bottom line was that I HAD forgotten to do it, I was sorry, and I was working to fix the mistake so that he would receive the raise from the time he was entitled to it. He left feeling better about the situation and so did I. This took vulnerability on my part, but the result was worth it. Oddly enough, this incident seemed to **increase** his trust of me rather than **decrease** it. Go figure.*

I am sure that many of us have stories of how our trust has been broken in religious communities. Or how having more trust might have made a religious community a better place. I am sure that many of us have

stories of what it has meant to us to receive trust from others, who have received vulnerability from others. I invite you to think about your stories of trust in religious communities and share them with others. I looked for articles and insights on trustbuilding for this sermon and found several good lists of various traits or practices that were necessary, but nothing seemed as deep as I had hoped, as deep and powerful as a religious community needs.

Until..... I found a video by Brené Brown. She is a researcher in the College of Social Work at the University of Houston. She is also an author, storyteller and public speaker. Although she is not a minister or theologian or a church researcher, I have found so much of her work to be meaningful in worship and in the lives of congregations.

In the video, titled *The Anatomy of Trust*, Brown lays out the essential aspects for developing trust, in the form of an acronym. Before I get into that, though, I want to give the definition of trust that she uses, from a man named Charles Feltman, a specialist in organizational development:

Trust is choosing to make something important to you vulnerable to the actions of someone else.

This definition seems to get at the core of what genuine trust is – and it is inclusive. The ‘something’ could be our emotions, our actions, our past, any aspect of our lives.

Brown also uses Feltman’s definition of Distrust:

Distrust comes when what I have shared with you that is important to me is not safe with you.

Again, this definition applies to so many things, not just about what is spoken. We share bodies, we share stories, we share relationship, we share intimacy, we share work and time and space. All things of importance and value.

A couple of other generalities about trust before I get into what is central to trust. Ze Frank, the author/narrator of the video we watched for our meditation said this about trust in the video:

Trust is the slow and steady practice of learning about the capacity of the world.

So, trust takes time and it is a practice of learning about how much and what it is possible to trust.

And finally, Brené Brown also says in her video –

Trust is built in very small moments.

Not large single gestures or events.

We have this definition of trust from Charles Feltman:

Trust is choosing to make something important to you vulnerable to the actions of someone else.

From Ze Frank:

Trust is a practice, a slow and steady practice, of learning about the capacity of the world.

And from Brené Brown and her research:

Trust is built in very small moments.

In Brené Brown’s video, *The Anatomy of Trust*, she outlines the necessary aspects of trust using a very easy to remember acronym: **BRAVING**.

Because, as she says, when we trust, we are braving connection with someone.

B = Boundaries. I can trust you only when you are clear about your boundaries, and you hold them, and when I am clear about MY boundaries and you respect them. Both are essential for my trust.

R = Reliability. I can only trust you if you do what you say you are going to do. Not just once, but over and over and over again.

And that means we all have to know our limits, so we don't make promises beyond our capacity.

A = Accountability. I can only trust you if, when you make a mistake, you own it, apologize for it, and make amends. I can only trust you if when I make a mistake, you allow me to own it, apologize for it, and make amends.

V = the Vault. I can only trust you when what I share with you, you hold in confidence. And what you share with me, I will hold in confidence.

But, Brown's research showed that there was another aspect to the Vault.

And that is, when you come to me and tell me a story about someone else, you are sharing a story that is not yours to share, and my trust of you is diminished. So, it's not just about you holding my confidences, trust requires that I see that you acknowledge confidentiality in general.

And sadly, too often, we use the sharing of stories that are not ours to tell as a way of building connection with others. As Brown says: ***If you don't have anything nice to say, come sit next to me, right?*** That means our intimacy is built on trashing the same people. And that's not real intimacy. And it's not real trust.

I = Integrity. I can only trust you when you act from a place of integrity and encourage me to do the same. So, what is Integrity? Brown came up with her own definition. It's when:

- Choosing courage over comfort;
- Choosing what's right over what's fun, fast, or easy;
- Practicing your values, not just preaching them.

N = Non-judgment. I can only trust you when I can fall apart, ask for help, and be in struggle without being judged by you. As in judged for my worth. And you can only trust me when you can fall apart, ask for help, and be in struggle without being judged as to your worth by me.

This is hard because most of us are more comfortable in helping than in asking for help. Trust requires being vulnerable and we're not so great at that. We can set up relationships that we think are trusting because we are there for someone else, no matter what. But that relationship is trusting if and only if, we can also ASK for help and receive it.

And here's the hook. If we unconsciously assign a lesser value to ourselves when **we** need help, we will also think less of people who ask us for help. We will judge them as less worthy. We do this because we do not wish to be vulnerable. It's too scary. So we can set up these fake one-way relationships that we think are trusting and are not. Where we are in the power seat of the helper. That's not trust.

G = Generosity. I can only trust you if you assume the most generous thing about my words, my intentions, and my behaviors. AND, you check in with me.

So, if I make a mistake and let you down, you will make the most generous assumption about what was going on with me and why I did what I did and check that out with me. Telling me what you expected from me, how I didn't do that, and how you felt. But that you know I care about you and that I know better.

I cannot trust you, if, when I make a mistake, you, as the recipient of my mistake, cut me off from communication. And wait for the right moment to unload on me, and letting me know that I hurt you deliberately and purposefully or whatever else you assume.

So, that is the anatomy of trust and it is complex.

BRAVING. Boundaries, Reliability, Accountability, the Vault, Integrity, Non-judgment, and Generosity.

Breaking Trust down this way gives us the words for when trust is broken, we can describe it in one or more of these terms. It's not vague or nebulous. It's clear and it's all behaviors that we can define. And then we can ask for what we need, specifically.

Then we don't have to have this huge thing hanging out there when we say ***I don't trust you.*** We can say what it is. And, as Brown notes, these qualities of BRAVING also come in to play with our trust of ourselves, our SELF trust. Self-trust is really the ground, the foundation, of our being able to trust and our ability to be trustworthy.

There's a great quote from Maya Angelou where she says:

I don't trust people who don't love themselves, but say 'I love you.'

Brown's final comments are:

So sometimes, when you are struggling with trust of someone, examine how you treat yourself FIRST. Because we can't ask people to give us something that we don't think we are worthy to receive. And you will know you are worthy of receiving trust when you trust yourself above everyone else.

Trust through BRAVING is necessary for the life and the health of this congregation. Trust is necessary for right relationship. And many of the elements of BRAVING are already in our UU Seven Principles and in this congregation's covenant of right relations. I invite you to look at our 7 Principles and our Covenant of Right Relations to see where BRAVING is in there.

In the coming weeks, I also invite you to consider Brown's understanding of the anatomy of trust. I know this sermon was a lot, so please ask me for a copy, and I will make sure it gets up online as a reference for you very soon.

And I invite you to consider the idea of BRAVING, not only in relation to yourself and to your relations with others among your family, your friends, your work, but here. Above all, here. We must have trust by offering it and being willing to receive it. And that can only happen when we understand what trust is made of.

BRAVING.

May it be so. Amen and blessed be.