

Rev. Lisa Schrott

June 21, 2026

Psalm 42:1-8 and Mark 10:23-31

*Deeper in Faith: Knowledge, Truth and Trust*

Our second reading this morning is from the Gospel of Mark. Mark is the shortest of the four gospels and tells the story of Jesus' ministry in vignettes that often appear rapid fire. Mark's gospel has no birth narrative, opening with Jesus' baptism. Beginning in the second half of chapter 1 through the end of chapter 9, the ministry of Jesus in the Galilean region is depicted. Chapter 10 opens with these words: "Jesus left that place (that being Capernaum near the Sea of Galilee) and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan. And crowds again gathered around him, and, as was his custom, he again taught them." We are at a pivot point in this Gospel. Jesus has begun the final leg of his ministry in Jerusalem, and is preparing his disciples for what lay ahead on the journey to the cross. Hear now this teaching from Mark 10:23-31:

Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." They were greatly astounded and said to one another, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible."

Peter began to say to him, "Look, we have left everything and followed you." Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for my sake and for the sake of the good news who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first." **The Word of God for the people of God.**

During my junior year in college, I hit a prayer dry spell. Something that had been so natural became artificial. It was as if I could not remember how to breathe. It took me a good six months before I had the courage to talk to the college chaplain about this. I was embarrassed. I was an Elder in the College Church, preparing to go the PC(USA) General Assembly as a Youth Advisory Delegate. How could I not be able to pray? Rev. Miller, the college chaplain, did what good professors do for students struggling to make sense of the world. He told me not to worry, gave me a book to read, and checked in on me regularly. When I continued to struggle, Rev. Miller advised me to stop trying so hard. Rather than trying to focus on my normal prayer practices, he told me to thank God at the end of the day for something that had happened. That practice helped. Eventually one night when I least expected it, the wall came tumbling down. I heard God's voice clearly for the first time in a long time. God reassured me that I was already claimed as child of God, reminding me of my baptism and encouraging me not to try so hard. It is a message I have to remind myself of often when my perfectionistic tendencies rear up.

How do we know God? How do we know we have a relationship with God? How do we deepen our faith in God? During this summer season we will explore ways we can deepen our faith through our communal worship, as well as through experiential practices outside of our time together on Sunday mornings. We will be using material put together by the Omaha Presbyterian Seminary Foundation that includes a ritual action for the week and a prayer journal. I will explain those elements in a bit more detail later in our service.

When we talk about deepening our faith, when we talk about knowing God, we usually start with scripture. Scripture reveals the story of God's love for us from creation to the new creation; through our times of following closely to God's will for our individual and communal lives and the times we have followed our own path. Through the voices of poets and prophets, warriors and peacemakers, the experienced and the young, the questioners and the doubters and those who never look back, we hear how the triune God has interacted with God's people. In the scriptures recounting the life of Jesus, we hear how Jesus challenged the disciples and those who followed him to move beyond literal words to understand what it means to be part of the reign of God rather than the reign of human kings and rulers. It means that what the world values like holding on to individual wealth is not the priority for a life of faithfulness to God.

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It means that there will be sacrifice and that the rewards of a life of faithfulness will be different than the rewards of the world, for many who are first will be last, and the last will be first. It means that we acknowledge our need for God in our life, as we heard from the words of Psalm 42 that Ewen read: "As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God." Scriptures like these are a way for us know God and deepen our faith. Yet knowledge of the scriptures is not the only way. We know that our individual experiences matter. Our traditions matter. And our understanding of the world in which we live matters.

In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, Methodist theologian Albert Outler coined the term the "Wesleyan Quadrilateral" as a way of encapsulating the entities that shape our beliefs and practices as Christians. The Quadrilateral recognizes that our faith relies on four sources of authority: Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Experience. While *Scripture* may be the primary source of authority for most Christians, it is balanced by *Tradition* – that is the historical teachings, creeds, and practices of the church; *Reason* – that is our intellect and human capacity to think coherently and place scripture in the context in which it was written and to apply it to our world today; and *Experience*: an individual's personal, lived encounter with God.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A good explanation can be found at <https://www.wesleyan.org/the-wesleyan-quadrilateral>

This understanding of faith as more than simply knowledge – a collection of facts about God – has deep historical roots. Two figures that were foundational in our understanding of faith are Augustin of Hippo (otherwise known as St. Augustine) who lived in the 4th-5th centuries and Anselm of Canterbury (otherwise known as St. Anselm) who lived in the 11th century. They both attempted to describe the study of God – what we call theology – through the lens of faith.

Augustine originated the definition of theology as “faith seeking understanding.” The theology text I used in seminary (and I suspect the one used by many pastors in the reformed traditions) was titled *Faith Seeking Understanding*. The notion that we begin with faith and then we deepen our knowledge through reason and experience was fleshed out by Anselm. He is quoted as saying: “I do not seek to understand in order that I may believe, but rather, I believe in order that I may understand.” Faith is the starting point, not the conclusion. For Anselm, believers are called to engage their intellects to comprehend what they believe, but intellect is not sufficient. Experience with the divine matters.<sup>2</sup>

The Rev. Jessica Crane Munoz provides some details on how our understanding of this dynamic played out during the Reformation era in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. She shares that “a Reformation theologian named Philipp Melanchthon offered a framework that identified three essential elements of faith: knowledge, truth, and trust.

- Knowledge is intellectual comprehension – hearing and understanding the facts related to the Biblical stories.
- Truth is believing the elements of the triune God revealed in scripture to be true.
- Trust is the reliance on the promises of faith.

While Melanchthon saw these stages of faith as somewhat linear, Crane Munoz shares that it is not always a neat and orderly pattern, because our faith is shaped throughout our lives.

Every one of us carries a faith story. For some of us, that story began in childhood — sitting in a pew, hearing Bible stories, learning to fold our hands in prayer. For others, it began later, perhaps when a crisis that cracked open something we did not know was there, or through a relationship with someone whose faith was so genuine it made us curious to learn more. And for all of us, the story of our faith development is still unfolding and will continue to do so for all our days on earth. What our individual stories have in common is that faith did not simply appear fully formed. It grew. It developed. It was shaped by experiences, by teaching, by questions, and by moments of trust.”<sup>3</sup>

Three essential elements of faith: knowledge, truth, and trust. The beauty of this framework, Crane Munoz notes, “is that it reminds us that genuine faith engages the whole person — the mind that seeks to understand, the conscience that wrestles toward conviction, and the heart

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<sup>2</sup> Daniel L. Migliore. *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*. United States: W.B. Eerdmans. 1991, p2-3; see also [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Credo\\_ut\\_intelligam](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Credo_ut_intelligam); [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fides\\_quaerens\\_intellectum](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fides_quaerens_intellectum)

<sup>3</sup> Rev. Jessica Crane Munoz. *Sermon Notes. Deeper in Faith Week 1*. Omaha Presbyterian Seminary Foundation.

that dares to rest in something beyond itself. The spiritual practices we will explore throughout this [summer worship] series are the ways we tend to all three.”<sup>4</sup>

A blog post by Daniel Pentimone has a great analogy for these elements of faith. He uses the example of an airplane. **Knowledge** is hearing about and understanding the concept of a plane, that it is composed in a certain way and that it is intended to go up in the air. **Truth** is accepting that this information is reliable, that planes will actually go up and come back down safely. **Trust** is getting on the plane.<sup>5</sup>

Knowledge, truth, and trust – a linked trinity. A circle. We can get on the plane, even if we don’t understand the intricacies of aerodynamics. The moments when we experience the depth of God’s love, when we experience mercy and forgiveness, when we trust God’s plan for our life, when we recognize our dependence on God and our family of faith, these experiences are all part of our pathway to God, just as the words we read and study in scripture are.

Psalm 42 tells us: “These things I remember, as I pour out my soul: how I went with the throng and led them in procession to the house of God, with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival...By day the Lord commands his steadfast love, and at night the Lord’s song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life.”

These things I remember.... In his essay *A Room Called Remember*, from the book of the same title, Presbyterian pastor and writer Frederick Buechner frames the power of this type of remembering, saying, “Remember what he (God) has done in the lives of each of us; and beyond that remember what he has done in the life of the world; remember above all what he has done in Christ-remember those moments in our own lives when with only the dullest understanding but with the sharpest longing we have glimpsed that Christ’s kind of life is the only life that matters and that all other kinds of life are riddled with death; remember those moments in our lives when Christ came to us in countless disguises through people who one way or another strengthened us, comforted us, healed us, judged us, by the power of Christ alive within them. All that is the past. All that is what there is to remember. And *because* that is the past, *because* we remember, we have this high and holy hope: that what he (God) has done, God will continue to do, that what God has begun in us and our world, God will in unimaginable ways bring to fullness and fruition.”<sup>6</sup>

Friends, this is our hope and promise. And this is the work we have ahead. To commit to seeking knowledge, living in the truth, and trusting that God will indeed bring each of us the fullness of our lives. May it be so. Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> *ibid*

<sup>5</sup> <https://fromdanielsdesk.com/2021/04/11/the-three-components-of-true-faith/>

<sup>6</sup> Frederick Buechner. *A Room Called Remember*. In: *A Room Called Remember. Uncollected Pieces*. Harper One, 1992 pp.11-12; quote can also be found at <https://www.frederickbuechner.com/blog/2016/5/16/to-wait-in-hope>