



## **Choosing A Life of Trust**

### **Acts 2:42-47; Psalm 23; John 10:1-10**

### **Reverend Giuseppe Mattei (April 30, 2023)**

We just had another day of spring cleaning. This time, we focused on the Administration Building of our campus. Again, many turned out to volunteer for this in-house event. And this just on the heel of the spring cleaning of the Sanctuary we had two weeks ago and the yard sale (Trinkets and Treasures) we had last week. We are in love with the Lord of Life and we want to share our faith with others. We show hospitality also in the way we keep our campus. Our fundraising enables us to reach out to others.

What models of generosity do you have in your life? Where did you learn generosity? How did you come to trust that letting go and sharing your possessions and your life with others would actually enrich you? How was God part of that learning experience?

Inspired by the experience of the resurrection, the fledgling Christian community resolved to trust God and one another *completely*: they sold what they owned and put everything in common. They trusted God and one another. They trusted in the constant presence of God. The Spirit of God assured them that following the Risen Lord was the way to go. In fact, Jesus' abandonment into the arms of the Father during his life and his resurrection after a cruel execution demonstrated that indeed Jesus was the Way to the Father, that in him we can have abundant Life, and that his Truth brings us clarity, exposes deceitful lies, and liberates people from the oppression of fear. The early Church was clear about whose voice she chose to follow.

The Good Shepherd's distinct voice speaks a message directed to each one of us known intimately by our own name. And the message is clear: he is the gate through which we find meaning and purpose, belonging and safety, forgiveness and healing, a green pasture by living water. And we come and go, in and out not away from Jesus but with Jesus and in the name of Jesus. Our outreach will attract no one if it is meant to attract people to us, to fill up pews, or to replenish the treasure chest. Outreach in the name of Christ is intended to serve others and not us. This kind of altruistic outreach will heal and renew the life of the world; it's generous and other centered – and the other is identified as Christ to us.

A recent article in The Wall Street Journal, reports about the increase of faith in young adults:

“About one-third of 18-to-25-year-olds say they believe—more than doubt—the existence of a higher power, up from about one-quarter in 2021, according to a recent survey of young adults. The findings, based on December polling, are part of an annual report on the state of religion and youth from the Springtide Research Institute, a nonpartisan nonprofit... Theologians and church leaders attribute the increase in part to the need for people to believe in something beyond themselves after three years of loss.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [The Surprising Surge of Faith Among Young People \(msn.com\)](https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/faith/the-surprising-surge-of-faith-among-young-people)

Young Americans are now turning to the same comfort previous generations have turned to for healing and comfort during personal and national tragedies. Believing in God gives one a reason for living and some hope. Having an intellectual and perhaps even an emotional argument for the existence of a higher power may certainly give people solace and reference in times of trouble. It might be comforting to seek refuge in God (by whatever name) even for shallow and mundane motives (win the lotto, pass a test...). Will I turn to that same God when things go my way and am faced with no substantial challenges? It's easy to fall back and rely on self when not scared or exhausted at the bottom of the pit. But tragedies can humble us and bring us closer to God. That's a good opportunity to learn who God truly is and how God wants to remain a constant in our life.

In his writings and sermons, medieval German mystic Meister Eckhart (1260–1327) counseled detachment from anything that would separate us from God, whom he understood as the very ground of our being.

Meister Eckhart described faith not as an extra thing people needed to take on but a shedding of all distractions, attitudes, and motives that stall and complicate the pursuit of God. In fact, he suggested “God is not found in the soul by adding anything, but by a process of subtraction.”<sup>2</sup> He actually came to suggest that one doesn't really need to “*pursue*” God as if God were hard to find (see Romans 10:8-13). God may be found when we relax in God: Eckhart insists, “God asks only that you get out of God's way and let God be God in you.”<sup>3</sup> And reflecting on Meister Eckhart's spirituality, Fr. Matthew Fox elaborates: “We are to sink eternally from letting go to letting go into God.”<sup>4</sup>

And that, too, is about trust.

Jesus clarifies that he has come to give us abundant life. But what does he mean? Some Christians have come to surmise that it means the “good life” of many fine things, an opulent lifestyle. Psalm 23 imagines an abundant life not in material terms but in relational terms. An abundant life is one lived in the presence of God, in the company of the Lord. Whether one is in green pastures or the darkest valley, there is nothing to want, because God is present. The sheep trust the shepherd. We are in the gracious and generous care of our Lord through times of material abundance and in times of want and scarcity. This relationship between our Lord and us who are his followers is a relationship with one who knows us well, who knows us by name, and who knows what we truly need to be fulfilled. All we need is abundantly ready for our asking.

The reason Psalm 23 resonates so deeply with people is because of its brutal honesty. The psalm names the hard truths of our lives: we live in the shadow of death, we dine in the presence of our enemies. There is pain and grief and sorrow in this life. Psalm 23 acknowledges this truth, and still points to hope. Do we trust enough to abandon ourselves into his arms? How would trust in God impact your generous life?

Luke wrote in the book of Acts that nurtured by apostolic teaching, the wonders the apostles performed, and the weekly meal, the baptized community became so bound to Christ that it formed a tight interdependent community. It didn't exist historically, but that is the goal of the resurrection. May our baptism in the risen Lord inspire us to build a culture of generosity. Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> Meister Eckhart, sermon on Romans 8:18

<sup>3</sup> Meister Eckhart, sermon on 1 John 4:9

<sup>4</sup> Matthew Fox, Meditations with Meister Eckhart