

“Do not let your hearts be troubled”

May 22, 2011

Text: Psalm 31:1-5, John 14:1-14

I.

Our reading this morning from John 14 is part of the lengthy discourse speeches of Jesus in John’s gospel. These speeches seemingly go on and on, in melancholic tones, trying to reassure the disciples about *ultimate things* (i.e., the meaning of life and life and death issues).

But these *ultimate things*, understandably, make the disciples nervous and anxious. What does it all mean?

Earlier, Jesus has raised Lazarus from the dead, an unfolding that has everyone buzzing with wonder about who he is. But then, not long after that, Jesus speaks to the disciples about his own imminent death.

And then the disciples have this deeply personal, spiritual experience where Jesus, acting as the servant, washes their feet (he does this as an example of how they are to treat one another).

Mixed in with this, Jesus predicts that **one of the disciples** will betray him ... and that **Peter** will deny him. Dealing with all of this—together—puts the disciples on emotional overload.

And then, as an over-arching reminder of who he is and what they are to be about, he gives them a New Commandment: *love one another just as I have loved you.*

The intent in all of this is pastoral. Jesus is trying to be reassuring to the disciples. And so, when we come to chapter 14, he tells them straight away:

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.

For the author of John’s gospel, our hearts are only free of trouble and heartache when we believe in God ... and when we believe in Jesus. John wants desperately for people—particularly the Jews who stubbornly continue to reject Jesus ... he wants them to believe. For John, belief in Jesus is everything.

II.

If you’ve ever spent much time with the gospel of John, no doubt you’ve noted how puzzling and challenging some of the concepts and language are. At times it seems almost impenetrable.

***I am the way, the truth and the life.
NO one comes to the Father except through me.***

***Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, Show us the Father?
Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?
The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own ...***

To begin with, with the gospel of John, we should never take it literally. Virtually the whole gospel is metaphor and symbolic language. Which, of course, doesn't mean it is not true; in fact, if anything, it means it is even more true.

The Christology in John's gospel—the way Jesus is understood and presented—reflects what we call a *high Christology*. The higher the Christology, the more God and Jesus are viewed as one and the same.

- A *high Christology* places a strong emphasis on the divinity of Jesus.
- A *lower Christology* places greater emphasis on the humanity.

In John, Jesus and God are very much indistinguishable. It's a *high Christology*.

1. Jesus is *in the Father* ... and *the Father is in Jesus*.
2. Whoever has *seen* Jesus has *seen* the Father. And so forth ...

III.

No matter your Christology and how you view Jesus and GOD, what John's gospel is really about is passion and intimacy ... around belief that Jesus is God's Messiah.

The author of John overflows with passion ... with deep-seeded belief of what God has done in Christ—namely, reveal God's self ... reveal God's nature, God's truth, God's ways. All of this is revealed through Christ.

As far as Jesus being ***the way, the truth and the life*** ... and that no one comes to God except through him,

1. rather than view this literally and in ways that reject the validity of other faith traditions,
2. why not view this as an example of the deep passion and belief of John?

There's an intimacy to John that draws us in. It's part of what gives the gospel of John its wide appeal—particularly to new Christians. Jesus is all these things:

- the good shepherd ... the bread of life ... the light of the world ...
- the resurrection and the life. He's all these things.

These are all powerful metaphors that draw us in—that excite us ... that inspire us; that make us want to learn more about him ... about his teachings and his ways and the God that is revealed through him.

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.

When we hear these words through the prism of John's passion and the sense of intimacy that gushes forth, we're moved. And our belief and our faith are strengthened.

IV.

Robert Drake is from Tennessee and he writes stories about growing up there a generation ago. In one story, he talks about **Miss Caroline Walker**, who had been teaching piano in Tennessee for as long as anyone could remember and had become something of a legend.

Her two goals in teaching were to: (1) teach her girls the piano ... and (2) teach them to be ladies ...

She also taught them to play one piece perfectly at the annual piano recital. She would rehearse them over and over until they had it right. She would also give them specific instructions on (1) how to sit on the piano bench ... (2) to spread their skirt ... and (3) to announce the song by standing straight and holding their hands together at their waist.

When the night of the recital came, at the local high school auditorium, **Miss Caroline's** pupils were each waiting their turn. When **Ann Louise's** turn came, she was terrified and thought for sure she was going to faint. As she moved forward to the wings of the stage where Miss Carline was waiting, she wasn't sure she would make it.

Seeing how nervous Ann Louise was (her body has become stiff and rigid), Miss Caroline put her hands on Ann Louise's shoulders, bent down and whispered in her ear:

You have worked hard. You know this piece. You have nothing to fear. And remember, I am counting with you all the way.

And then, with a little shove, she pushed Ann Louise out onto the stage where, suddenly, she was facing this large audience of everybody's relatives, including her own. Calmly, She announced her piece ... spread her skirt ... and sat on the bench. Right away, she noticed that she was much calmer than she thought she would be. She also noticed that Miss Caroline was still there on the wings.

Then she remembered the last words she had said to her: ***I am counting WITH YOU all the way ... not I am counting ON YOU ... I am counting WITH YOU ...***

As **Robert Drake** explained it, what Ann Louise felt was that somehow there was this bond between her and her teacher, something larger than herself that she couldn't totally explain. It was as if *teacher* and *disciple* were one. She realized that indeed this was what she had been preparing for all year long—this test, this moment ...

And then the music, at her command, came cascading out of the baby grand into the welcoming hearts of the multitudes ... full of life and joy ...

This is exactly the feeling of reassurance and confidence that Jesus wanted for his disciples:

***Do not let your hearts be troubled. Neither let them be afraid.
Believe in God, in something larger than yourself.
And believe in me.***

V.

The word for us this morning, friends, is a powerful word of promise and hope—that God is with us ... that we are never alone. And because God is with us and Jesus is our inspiration, we need NOT be troubled.

1. Not by our persisting fears and anxieties of what tomorrow might bring ...
2. Not by the failures and rejections that at times come our way ...
3. Not by the nagging doubts that at times creep into our minds and spirits ...

Do not let your hearts be troubled.

4. Not by a sputtering economy that is still seeking to find its way ...
5. Not by the health and well being of family and friends ...
6. Not by our personal losses that tear at our soul and bring unceasing ache to our hearts.

Stay strong, stay focused on God, and make your life about LOVE. ***Do not let your hearts be troubled.***

At age 93, **Rose Kennedy** was being interviewed by a magazine reporter. At this point in her life, four of her children had died a violent death and another daughter had been severely retarded her whole life. By any measure, the depths of tragedy that had visited her life were unimaginable. When asked about all of this, she responded;

In spite of all that has happened, I have always believed that God wants us to be happy. He doesn't want us to be sad.

And then she added, ***Birds sing after a storm; why shouldn't we?***

Why shouldn't we indeed? It may not be easy ... and we may not much feel like. Still, why shouldn't we? For we are never alone. And God has come to us in Christ with an unrelenting hope. But more, still, in John, there is a passion and an intimacy that embraces us with its reassurance and its love.

- *With God being in Jesus and Jesus being in God ...*
- *And remembering that ... in knowing Jesus, we also know God.*
- This is deeply powerful stuff. And with all this warmth and intimacy, it's like a huge love fest.

VI.

You know the feeling of being with people that love you unconditionally, where the love simply overflows. It's the best feeling and the best of times ...

This LOVE is the place that Jesus prepares for us ... and it is the place where faith in Jesus takes us. And why is this? Because that's where God is ... God IS this love-force that draws us together ... and God has come to us in Christ with a powerful love.

Love is the way, the truth and the life ... and Jesus embodies this love in ways that save the world.

And so, we can celebrate with the **Psalmist**, whose faith is like a mighty fortress.

In you, O Lord, I seek refuge ...
Incline your year to me ...

You are indeed my rock and my fortress ...
For your name's sake, lead me and guide me ...

Into your hand I commit my spirit ...
You have redeemed me, O Lord ... you are my hope and my salvation ...

All praise be unto God! Amen!

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