

FIRST LESSON: Isaiah 26: 1-4; 19
SECOND LESSON: John 14:1-14
May 7, 2023

“Do Not Let Your Hearts Be Troubled”

Sermon © Lisa C. Farrell

“Do not let your hearts be troubled.” I have read these words of scripture from John’s gospel so often at funerals I practically have them memorized. And you no doubt have heard them read many times, depending upon how many funerals you have attended. But familiarity can dull the senses. We can stop hearing them. And because we tend to hear these words only at funerals, they lose their original context.

Jesus spoke these words at the Last Supper. He was troubled in spirit. He had just finished saying, “Very truly I tell you, one of you is going to betray me.” When John asked him who it was, Jesus answered, “It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.” Then, he dipped the piece of bread, and gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. And Jesus told him, “What you are about to do, do quickly.” The other disciples didn’t realize what was happening. Once Judas was gone, he continued teaching, telling the disciples that they must love one another. He also said that he must go away. Peter asked where he was going and Jesus told him that, “Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later.” Peter asked, “Lord, why can’t I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.” And Jesus answered, “Will you really lay down your life for me? Very truly I tell you, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!”

THIS is what precedes the words, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me.” Who would not be anxious and fearful at this turn of events? Jesus himself was troubled! One of them was a traitor, another a failure, and Jesus would be leaving them. It would have been like an earthquake beneath their feet. These men had traveled together for three years. They thought they knew each other well. They thought they knew themselves! They thought that following Jesus would bring the kingdom of God and glory. They thought that Jesus would always be there with them. And now it was all crumbling before their eyes. And it did not make much sense that Jesus added, “My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”

Prepare a place? Where? Jesus says he is returning to the Father, and that in his Father’s house there are many rooms or dwelling places. What exactly does that mean?

We assume that “my Father’s house” means heaven. It doesn’t actually say that. It could be heaven, but the only thing we know for sure is that it involves the presence of God. The “Father’s house” is a place where God dwells.

We don't know what form that takes, because this world of physicality does not apply. Jesus was saying that there is plenty of room for us. He was trying to explain that which cannot be explained because we don't have the concepts for it. We are limited by space and time, and God exists outside of space and time.

And then there's the elephant in the room—what happened to all those mansions? Aren't we all going to get a mansion in heaven? That's what the King James Version of the bible says, "In my father's house there are many mansions." Never mind that that is not logical. Mansions don't fit inside of a house. The literal minded among us have run away with the concept of mansions anyway!

Sorry, but no. The original Greek word meant a place where a person could lodge or dwell, more like a room. When the Greek made it to Latin it became *mansiones*, which did mean the same thing. Turning it into English the translators of the King James chose "mansions," because at the time it did mean the same thing. But over time the meaning of the word "mansions" gradually changed to now mean massive palatial houses. Jesus did not go to heaven to start a huge construction project, however. Heaven is not about a life of luxury. Heaven is about being with God. It is about peace and joy and love. Heaven is about relationship with and proximity to God.

There are those who have it all neatly worked out. We stay in heaven for awhile until the final judgement and then we are all physically resurrected and there is a new heaven and a new earth. This imagery is found in scripture. But it is an image of a reality that is impossible for us to comprehend, because it depends upon linear time. Time is a created thing. It is virtually impossible for us to think outside of linear time. One thing happens after another in our reality. But God exists outside of time, and there are no words for that.

The point Jesus was answering was about separation. Jesus will bring us into God's presence. There is a place for us there. But the disciples were every bit as literal as we are. Jesus told them, "You know the way to the place where I am going." And Thomas, (with whom I have great sympathy) said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"

Jesus then answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

This verse has unfortunately been plucked out of its context and made to be the standard bearer with which to confront people about their need for salvation. *If you don't accept Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior according to the guidelines we have created, you are not saved!* But these words were spoken to offer comfort. Jesus himself is the way to God, because Jesus is God. We get to God through God. God is truth. The truth sets us free. There are no lies in God. Jesus is the life because God is the source of all life. When Jesus says, "No one comes to the Father, except through me," he is not giving us a five-step process to follow complete with a copy of the "Sinner's Prayer" of repentance with words we must recite exactly. He is saying that he is the channel of blessing and grace. Jesus was speaking of his oneness with God. And he went on to say, "If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."

Of course, this does not go well. Philip says, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.”

Jesus had to have been exasperated. “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves.”

And then Jesus adds to the mystery, because he says that, “whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.”

This is a bit hard to take in on many levels. Not one of us has turned water into wine, or fed 5000 people with a few loaves and fish. No one sitting here that I know of has laid hands on a crippled person and seen them walk, or a leper and seen them cleansed. But the Church over the centuries has accomplished amazing things. Yes, there have been bad things, but there have also been incredible acts of grace and mercy, things that have changed the very fabric of society for good. It is the Christian ideal that says all are created equal, that the weak should be protected and the poor cared for. Faithful people filled with the Spirit have brought light into the darkness and freedom to those in chains. But to do this it is not enough to speak in Jesus’ name. We must act in Jesus’ NATURE. Praying “in Jesus’ name” is not a magic formula. If all a person had to do was add “in Jesus’ name” to a request and it would be done, the world would be in a worse disaster than it already is. To act in the name of another person is to directly represent them—their intentions and their nature. If I speak in the king’s name, I better be real sure that what I am saying is exactly what the king wants said. We can ask for a lot of things and tag on “in Jesus’ name,” but if those things do not line up with Jesus’ nature, God will not answer those prayers. And anyone who has walked with God for even a little while soon learns that prayer is not like a vending machine. Answers to some prayers can be a long time in coming, or are not what we asked for at all.

The prophet Isaiah wrote: “You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you.” Jesus says, “believe in God; believe also in me. In My Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?” We will not know what the future holds until we get there because we cannot comprehend it. But we can know the One who holds the future. Amen.

Isaiah 26: 1-4; 19

1 In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah:
We have a strong city;
God makes salvation

its walls and ramparts.

- 2** Open the gates
that the righteous nation may enter,
the nation that keeps faith.
- 3** You will keep in perfect peace
those whose minds are steadfast,
because they trust in you.
- 4** Trust in the Lord forever,
for the Lord, the Lord himself, is the Rock eternal.
- 19** But your dead will live, Lord;
their bodies will rise—
let those who dwell in the dust
wake up and shout for joy—
your dew is like the dew of the morning;
the earth will give birth to her dead.

John 14:1-14

- 14** “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. **2** My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? **3** And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. **4** You know the way to the place where I am going.”
- 5** Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”
- 6** Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. **7** If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”
- 8** Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.”
- 9** Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? **10** Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. **11** Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. **12** Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. **13** And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. **14** You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.