

May 22, 2011
Fifth Sunday of Easter
John 14:1-14

“Let not your hearts be troubled.” In context, these words of Jesus kind of come flying out of left field. Jesus says this in the upper room on Thursday of Holy Week. Leading up to these words Jesus announces that one disciple will betray Him, that He is going someplace that the disciples can’t follow, and that Peter will deny Him three times. None of this is comforting news. In fact, it’s very troublesome and even alarming.

Yet Jesus immediately says, *“Let not your hearts be troubled.”* Peter especially must be thinking, “You’ve got to be kidding.” We tend to read this and think it’s Jesus saying some words of comfort to the disciples, but that the words are just that—words. Not comforting at all because they don’t remove the trouble. That it’s kind of like if you or I were to head up to one of the towns in the Atchafalaya Basin that’s being flooded out and saying to a homeowner, “Don’t worry about it.” It seems like Christ is acknowledging that the disciples’ world is coming crashing down around them in the loss and their abandoning of their beloved Rabbi Jesus, and that their hearts should not be troubled. Instead they should what? *“Believe in God; believe also in me.”* We think that Jesus words are true, but for the disciples it was empty words of comfort.

But we may tend to read this the wrong way. You see, all of the verbs here are in the imperative. These are more like commands rather than words of consolation. Think of it more along the lines of us going to that homeowner in the flood zone and not giving empty words of comfort, but instead saying, “Don’t freak out. I’m going down to Third and Main where they are giving out sandbags and I’m going to stack them seven feet high around your house, you evacuate and trust me, you’re going to come through this thing OK.”

Hear His words again, but take them in as words of action, not consolation, “*Let not you're your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.*” Jesus is doing something. Jesus is accomplishing something. He is telling the disciples that a bunch of ugly stuff is about to happen, but the He's got it all handled. Jesus does speak words of comfort to the disciples, but the comfort comes by explaining the end result of what He's about to do.

“In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.”

We hear these words of Jesus often at funeral and we tend to think of them as being about heaven. But I'd like you to think about them not in terms of us getting a room, but in terms of this being the mission Jesus is going to accomplish. Jesus is going to the cross and through the grave, and by doing so is preparing a place for us in the Father's presence. This is what this is all about—restoring our relationship with God. Mankind once had a place in God's presence. It was called Eden. We blew it. Adam chomped on the apple and seized control of his own life from God, and we've been separated from God ever since by the chasm of sin now standing between us.

Jesus is fundamentally addressing this separation/sin problem we have with God when He says, “*Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.*” Jesus is saying, “I'm going away to fix this. When I'm done, you'll be able to be with me again. Not only that, you'll be with my Dad too! It's going to be great.”

You and I live with the atoning work of Jesus in our past. The “fixing” of Jesus is behind us. He died with our sins and left them in the grave. He rose to new and eternal life in victory. He

hands us forgiveness and life as a gift in Baptism, the Lord's Supper and the promise fulfilled in Holy Scripture.

But let's face it, in this broken world filled with pain, nastiness, disappointment and all manner of evil, there are those times when we feel like we've been abandoned. We feel like the disciples did at that supper. We had hopes and dreams for our life with Jesus and things just are going totally in a different and bad direction than we thought they would. The sin that infects our lives has the consequence of messing up our lives, sometimes in big and devastating ways.

It can feel like we are standing in a flood plain, the spillway is open and there is the reality that all the stuff of our lives is on the verge of getting swamped by whatever badness and tragedy it is that we are facing. We may even look to Christ for comfort, but the kind consolation of His words falls flat on our ears. Maybe that's because we have this tendency to hear the words of Jesus like some kind friend or relative standing at our side in the midst of tragedy patting our shoulder and saying "There, there...it will be OK." Sure, it's a nice gesture, but it doesn't really do anything.

Jesus does not just talk. Jesus did something; He died for sins and rose in victory over all that is busted and nasty and evil. Jesus does something now. He forgives. He wipes away that which keeps us from returning to God. He gives life to we who were dead in our sins. Jesus is not just patting us on the back in our struggles. He is giving us the life which outlives our struggles and sees us through this flood or brokenness today and into that which is right—as in rightness with God—as in perfect righteousness.

When Jesus says through His Word to us, "*Let not you're your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.*" It's not wimpy words of comfort. It's promise. It's marching

orders. It is the making all our tragedies into rightness. It is the promise that Jesus does win over death, sin, the Devil, the bustedness of your life.

Hear your Lord Jesus in this way, not simply as a kind friend, but as God your Savior; the one who triumphantly went to and through death and the grave and came out exalted on the other side—all in order to destroy everything of your life that stands between you and the Father, between you and victory over every tragedy you face.

And remember also, Jesus Christ is the only one who did this for you, the only one who does this for you. In the midst of a broken world a lot of things promise a way out of our pain. Money. Drugs. Sex. Power. Education. Family. Even doing good works for others. Many things can be a distraction from our tragedies, but none of them is a cure.

The real disaster that destroys us is our separation from God. Nothing of a sinful world can remove that stain that keeps us apart. Life will always be broken, and quite frankly life will always be death, if we stand apart from our Father and Creator.

Jesus says with authority, *“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”* You can’t really hear these words of Jesus as comfort unless you first hear them as words of triumph, of promise, of rescue. You stand in the path of the flood of eternal damnation and death. There may be some other boats, some life jackets, a pirogue, but they are all things of the sinful world and they’re going to be swamped with everything else.

The Lord and creator of the universe who has gone through death itself to save you stands and says boldly and surely, *“Let not you’re your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one come to the Father except through me.”*

Listen to Him. Hear His words of action, of promise, of victory, and in them be comforted. Amen.