



Pastor Gwen's Message

5th Sunday of Easter

"Do Not Your Hearts Be Troubled"

Sunday, May 7, 2023

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Christ is Risen. . . . He is Risen Indeed! Alleluia!

In October of 2011, when I arrived at Christ the Servant, my first phone call was from a family that wanted to have their mom's funeral, at our church. I said sure and set a meeting with the family. Panic took over and I quickly called my old pastor Larry, and asked what on earth was I supposed to do. He gave me some quick advice, since I had not yet had that course at Wartburg, and I muddled my way through it. It was quite an experience and since then, I have created a funeral planning guide for the family and mostly for me to use when making decisions about a memorial or funeral service. One of the things I put in this brochure was a list of some scripture texts that the family could choose from to include in the service and give me some place to start with a sermon or eulogy. Today's Gospel text is one of those Scripture passages. Outside of the 23rd Psalm, it is probably the text most often chosen by the loved ones. In fact, yesterday this was the text that the family chose for the funeral I took part in at Zion in Winter.

That is not to say that it is the most popular, but I suspect that people can relate to this passage and that it gives comfort. However, one inherent danger to using a passage that is familiar is that one might tend to miss the meaning. Just like the Pledge of Allegiance or the Apostles Creed or the Lord's Prayer. We sometimes just recite from memory without really thinking about the words. That is why I like to change the liturgy and our confessional words with each new church season.

This text begins with "Do not let your hearts be troubled." Chapters 13-17 in John represent a long farewell by Jesus. His time on earth is ending and he still has lots to teach his followers. Chapter 13 is about loving one another, 15 is about staying connected and 16 tells us that God will always be with us. This chapter begins with telling these men that they should not fear, do not be afraid, do not let your hearts be troubled. Not being fearful of Jesus leaving them, leaving the earth, may be the most important thing that they need to hear. There were certainly many things to be afraid of including the Roman soldiers, the

temple guards, and the crowds who only a week before welcomed Jesus into the holy city but will soon call for his crucifixion.

For us too there are many things in our world to be afraid of. The world today is a scary place. Will the pandemic rear its ugly head again as COVID 23? Will some crazy shoot our kids as they sit in their classrooms? Will Putin start a nuclear war? Will we all drown when the polar ice caps continue to melt? Will we fear for our safety at our favorite shopping mall? Yes, these are some of the big headlines that are sensationalized by our media. Real or imagined fear can keep us awake at night.

And those are only the biggies. We all face fear much closer to home. They don't seem significant unless you are living with them. Will my cancer come back? Will our daughter come home again to live with us at age 36? Will the basement flood this year with the warm weather and heavy rain in the forecast?

So, what are you fearful of? Do any of these, ring your bell or do you have other things on your list that make your heart troubled? Do not be ashamed, this is part of our human condition. Some people are fearful of failure. They cannot make a decision because they are afraid to take risks and become vulnerable, to fall on their face, so to speak. Other people are afraid of losing control. That is a good one. People avoid making changes so that stability continues, and they can be sure of things around them. Still others are fearful of rejection and criticism. This fear of what others might think of them is very present in our society today. Children learn this at an early age as they are bullied at school or lack positive reinforcement at home. Our seniors have a common fear of being alone. And not just alone in physical experience but also, we often have the feeling that no one knows exactly what it is like to be us. Mr. Rogers said at the end of his famous children's' programs, "You've made this day a special day, by just your being you. There's no person in the whole world like you, and I like you just the way you are."

I read this week that the most common fear is simply the fear of the unknown. Do you know who Doris Day was? Well, she had an amazing spin on this fear. Remember the song she sang, "When I was just a little girl, I asked my mother, What will I be? Will I be pretty, will I be rich? Here's what she said to me. "Que, sera, sera, whatever will be, will be; the future's not ours to see; que sera, sera."

For some not knowing the future can be exhilarating and exciting. But for others it can be scary. Who knows what tomorrow has in store for any of us? God alone!

Our Scripture text gives us the answer to all these fears. "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God." Jesus showed us the way as he walked the earth. When a fierce storm whipped up on the sea, he remained calm. He said, "Peace, Be still." And the storm obeyed. He told Herod, who he called a fox, that he was able to cast out demons, perform cures and complete his mission in three days. And as he hung on the cross, bearing the weight of our sin, he died with dignity looking to God and said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" Jesus modeled a life without fear. He showed us how to live freely and

joyfully in harmony with God and all creation. He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through me."

Walking in His footsteps, we need not be afraid. Jesus even promises that he will be with us every step of the way. And folks, we are no different than the disciples, we don't always get what Jesus is telling us. I do know that the devil tries to deceive us. He has the world telling us untruths like.

East, drink and be merry, for tomorrow you may die. Go for the gusto because you only go around once in this life. Or He who dies with the most toys win. NOT. In fact, I believe that these verses in John's Gospel are not about death, they are about life. They are not verses about the past. They are about the future. And it is sometimes true that we get stuck on the past and the here and now. We forget the promises of God. Verse 3, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also."

Folks, it does not matter what we call the place where we end up after our life here on earth ends. What matters is that we are with God. We will see Jesus face to face. All God's glory will surround us. I can remember as a little girl asking my Grandma Brown where Hell was. She had a simple answer. Gwen, she told me, "hell is anywhere that God is not". A simple answer but one worth remembering.

With that being true, don't buy into the old adage that if I am not good enough to earn heaven, then I might as well be bad enough to enjoy earth. That is so wrong. Jesus changed that on the cross. He died and rose again to forgive our sins and give us an abundant future. Our names are written in the Book of Life, and all you have to do is believe, believe in God. There is a place for you next to God for all eternity. So do not let your heart be troubled. Believe! **AMEN**

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