

**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**  
 East Moline, Illinois  
 Pastor Becky Sherwood  
**May 10, 2020, The 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Easter**  
 Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16, John 14:1-14  
**COMING OUT OF THE MASSEY TUNNEL**

Intro to John 14:

In the Gospel of John, Chapters 14-17 are known as the Farewell Discourses. They contain the words of goodbye that Jesus said to his disciples at the Last Supper. He knew that when he went out of that Upper Room, the cross and death, and ultimately resurrection, were waiting for him. At the end of his ministry he did everything he could to help his disciples and followers understand what was coming. He gave them the strength, comfort and promises of his love, before they walked into that valley with him. Listen for Jesus words to his disciples as we read John 14:1-14.

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This is our eighth Sunday of being away from each other on Sunday morning, and the end of our seventh week of caring for each other by Sheltering at Home during this world pandemic. This week as I was thinking about what these eight weeks have felt like, I was reminded of a life-shaking experience when I was in my early 20's.

In those years I used to cycle tour long distances on my bicycle, alone and with friends. One long weekend a friend and I were riding our bikes around Victoria and Vancouver British Columbia in southwestern Canada. Now you need to remember that this was before Google could tell you everything about everything you needed to know.

Through some faulty information we were led to believe that we could take the ferryboat from Victoria to Vancouver B.C., and then ride our bikes from the ferry landing, through the Massey Tunnel that goes under the Fraser River, and arrive in downtown Vancouver.

Now it was true that bicycles were allowed to be in a bike lane on the highways.

BUT, as we entered the tunnel it became immediately and abundantly clear that we had been given horrible information about bikes in the Massey Tunnel.

The Massey Tunnel goes downhill very quickly to go under the Fraser River. It is a two-lane highway with absolutely no bike lane and no side lane at all! So, imagine two lanes of freeway traffic going 55 miles an hour, or more, during the morning commute,

the white tile walls of the tunnel zipping past you—right beside you, section by section.

people in cars, in the lane with you, staring at you with open-mouthed terror, gesturing and honking to tell you that you don't belong there,

and you have no idea how long the tunnel is.

And then there were the floor drains and their covering grates.

The width of the drain covers was over half a lane wide,

and the metal dividing bars all went in the same direction as our tires,

with no perpendicular bar to prevent a thin bicycle tire from jamming into the grate and throwing its rider into traffic.

Time slowed down, although our bikes were going very, very fast.

I held onto the handlebars for dear life,

I prayed frantically,

I prayed that I wouldn't have to watch my friend die in front of me as we crossed the first of many grates,

and I peddled as I had never peddled before.

Thankfully a very kind semi-truck driver finally pulled in behind us and protected us from traffic, until we made it through the tunnel, got off our bikes and stood shaking for a while.

That downward descent into the Massey Tunnel feels familiar doesn't it, as each of us have held on tightly, and peddled through these last weeks filled with:

the uncertainty of what is happening next,  
the heart-breaking stories in the news,  
the daily reports of new cases of Covid19, and Covid19 deaths in our community, our country,  
and our world,

weeks filled with:

the struggles of unemployment, and underemployment, and working from home,  
the stories of people ill and dying alone in hospitals, without family at their sides,  
the powerful stories of the courage of the medical personnel on the front lines,  
the fears for our own health, and the health of those we love,

weeks filled with:

the strange world of worshiping apart from each other, Sunday by Sunday,  
the strange world of grocery shopping safely,  
the struggles of families with children, with so much time on their hands,

and weeks filled with:

all the small, medium and catastrophic changes to our lives,  
we know what it feels like to feel completely out of control,  
hurtling downhill with no end in sight!

And in the mysterious grace of God's timing, the Lectionary passages for today contain an ancient prayer and a promise for the living of these days. And I'm going to warn you now that I am inviting you to memorize some of these verses in the week ahead.

We each need these words in our tool kit for the living of these Covid19 days.

As we do so many things in new ways, I'm inviting you to borrow an old faith tradition and memorize some Bible verses this week.

In the Psalms, the hymnbook of our Hebrew mothers and fathers of faith we hear these words:

"But I trust in you, O Lord; I say, "You are my God." My times are in your hands...save me in your steadfast love."

Now there is a prayer we can pray while holding tightly to the handlebars and trying to drive through these days!

In the moments when we feel like we can take a little more time, then we can add verses 1-5, because they are an equally strong prayer.

But if you are like me, then there have been times during these weeks when the anxiety and fear level gets too high. It is choking at times.

The sorrow gets too deep as I listen to the news, and to friends, and to stories from some of you.

When just going into the grocery store, gloved and masked, feels like a dangerous mission, in those moments I don't have the attention span for verses 1-5, but I can hold on to this short prayer from verses 14-16:

"But I trust in you, O Lord; I say, "You are my God." My times are in your hands...save me in your steadfast love."

When the road seems to be going downhill very fast "help me!" prayers are needed!

Which is why I encourage you to memorize this short prayer this week so it can be part of your heart the next time you need it.

Although I also recommend the even shorter, “God, Help!” because that was my main pray in the Massey Tunnel!

We, and our world, are loved and cared for by our God of compassionate love, in this season of world pandemic. We are not alone. We hear that promise in Jesus’ words to his disciples then and to us this morning in John 14: “Do not let your hearts be troubled...I am the way, and the truth and the life.”

Jesus spoke these words in the midst of his own Massey Tunnel journey. His was a journey that surpasses any tunnel we will face. He knew he was at the end of his life on earth.

He knew that he was facing the pain and torture of the cross.

He knew that Judas would betray him,

he knew that Peter would deny him,

he knew that the crowds would call for his death,

he knew that his disciples would abandon him

he knew that three days in the grave awaited him.

And yet there on that last night with his disciples,

he washed their feet to show them what true servanthood looks like.

He gave them a new commandment, to love one another.

He changed the Passover meal and made it a Lord’s Supper for us all.

He reached out with bread to Judas.

He kept loving Peter even as he spoke of Peter’s coming denial.

See: Green, Joel B, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, Cynthia L. Rigby, Carolyn J. Sharp, eds, *Connections, A Lectionary Commentary for Preaching and Worship, Year A, Volume 2 Lent through Pentecost*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019, p. 269.1.6

And Jesus spoke words for all of us in our Massey Tunnels, holding tight to the handlebars, peddling as fast as we can: “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.”

And because Massey Tunnel seasons often make us look at death, our own and those we love, Jesus spoke these words of promise:

“In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. 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, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going.”

Thomas said to Jesus, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?”

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.”

Jesus was standing at the edge of his final walk to the cross, and he gave us all the gift and promise that death is not the end.

Jesus has gone before us and prepared a place for us.

As one author puts it: “Trust that God has space for you, no matter how unreliable, proud, or unfinished you may be.” (emphasis mine)

Green, *Ibid*, 269.1.9

And I would add to that: God has a space for each of us, no matter how scared we are.

No matter how much the evening news, or the news of our families and friends, or our own life experiences, crumples our spirits.

No matter how anxious we are in these days,  
 No matter how much we struggle with depression,  
 No matter how stuck we feel,  
 the Christ who walked the way of suffering, and rose to new life for us, walks with us always,  
 moment by moment and breath by breath.

He hands us these words as comfort for these days,  
 so that we can slow our anxious breathing  
 and comfort ourselves, and those we love, and the strangers in our midst,  
 with his words.

Jesus says: "Do not let your hearts be troubled...I am the way, and the truth and the life."

I encourage you to memorize these words as well, to put them in your tool kit for living during a world pandemic.

One of the gifts of this Massey Tunnel world pandemic season is that we have time to focus on the journey of faith, maybe in ways we never have before. We are each being invited to pay attention to how our God is walking with us through these days.

I believe we are being invited into a new and deeper season of trust in our God,  
 even as the world around us changes with every news cycle,  
 and seems more unfamiliar than it ever has before, in our lifetimes.

So, let us hold onto the handlebars, let us pedal as we are able,  
 let us trust not only that there is light at the end of every tunnel,  
 but that the saving Light of the World, Jesus Christ, is in the tunnel with us.

Let us pray ancient prayers that have been given to us:

"But I trust in you, O Lord; I say, "You are my God." My times are in your hands...save me in your steadfast love."

And let us hold onto Jesus promise for us and for our world.

Jesus says:

"Do not let your hearts be troubled...I am the way, and the truth and the life."

Alleluia, Amen and Amen.