

## **Easter 5A. May 10, 2020. John 14:1-14.**

“Do not let your hearts be troubled.” This gentle command is not quite what we want to hear. We would rather know who will calm our troubled hearts and how. We want the causes of our hearts’ trouble to be removed and undone. It seems no good to command us to be at peace. How can we be at peace as we and those with us get weirder and weirder in our isolation, as the bank account drains and our rulers brag, as we watch the unfathomable daily numbers climb, as friends die without our touch, as injustice rages unchecked and we can do even less against the powers and principalities of this world than usual. This command drops out of the blue into the middle of our quarantine and it feels like Pollyanna has somehow wormed her way into the Upper Room and is feeding Jesus his lines.

But Jesus is not, assuredly, directing the disciples to pretend that there will be no pain. In the strange way that time works in the Easter season, we are back in the Upper Room, on the night before Jesus is arrested. This is the night that Jesus washed the disciples’ feet and ate with them for the last time this side of resurrection. This command for calm comes immediately after Jesus has told them that he will be leaving them, Judas has left to make his final betrayal, and Peter has been told that even his loyalty will fail in the coming hours. These comforting words do not come cheap. They are not an assurance that everything will go well or be easy. Jesus has been working hard to convince the reluctant disciples to realize what pain is coming. He is not saying, “don’t worry, be happy.” It is much more like, “in the hard times that are to come, we will more than ever need the hope that has brought us this far.”

I’m not sure how well the disciples get everything that’s going on here—they probably catch about as much as we do. They seem at least finally to get that stormy weather lies ahead. Thomas lays it out for Jesus: “we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” And Philip bursts out with the wildest ask, coming from the deepest need: “Lord, show us the Father and we will be satisfied.” Jesus tells them not to let their hearts be troubled. Thomas points out that they need to know much more than they do if they are to be at peace. Philip desperately asks for more resources to get through the days ahead—if we’re going to get through this, we need nothing less than the beatific vision, a glimpse of the only one who can keep us going. We do not know enough, we do not have enough, our spiritual life is not strong enough. We need to know the path forward; we need indisputable proof that our hopes are based on truth. We need certainty.

Jesus makes three promises in this passage, none of which are exactly what the disciples want. None of which, perhaps, are exactly what we want to calm our troubled hearts. Jesus promises the abiding company of God. (The Greek word here translated “dwelling places” is the noun form of the verb “to abide.”) Jesus promises to make a way for us to abide with God and, more specifically, he says that he is the way. Episcopalians cringe at this verse, worried that it excludes people of other or no faith. But Jesus is not trying to tell us who to shun; he is assuring us that a relationship with him is a relationship with God. Thomas asks for a road map and Jesus offers a relationship.

Finally, Jesus promises that those who believe will do things even greater than the works he has done. Again we get tripped up on this verse because it sure seems like we ask for things that we do not get. I don't think that we can take this as a promise that all prayers will be answered. The get out clause must be whatever it means to ask something "in Jesus' name." But what we can be sure of is that Jesus is promising the believing community will have the power to sustain itself and spread the gospel even further than Jesus did. When faced with even the greatest trials, the community of believers has already what it needs to keep the faith and do the work of the gospel. Philip asks for more spiritual help, for a deeper and greater spiritual experience, for something that will banish all doubt. Jesus offers himself with the assertion that we already have what we need to do what we are called to do. Perhaps not to do everything we want to do—but with God, to be called and to be empowered are the same thing.

"Do not let your hearts be troubled." But this doesn't come with what we wish it did. It does not come with certainty. It does not come with proof. It does not come with promises of ease or comfort. Jesus invites the disciples and us to leave behind certainty for trust, to build a relationship instead of demanding an answer.

My friends, this is not easy. And it is certainly not easy to learn how to do this in a traumatic, worldwide pandemic. But it does happen to be true. Now, when we have so little control over so much that is so important to us, we are all tempted by the frenzied search for certainty. And we have plenty of examples of neighbors who have declared certainty much too soon. I don't know how to care for people I love and cannot touch. There are days when I wake up not knowing how my family will make the day work. I can't imagine how we'll get through months and months more of this. But I do know who I trust. I trust that when I cannot be with sick friends, God is abiding with them, with a love that is stronger and longer than death. I trust that grace goes deeper than my patience and courage. I trust that God will not leave us, and will help us not to leave each other. I trust that God will help us to love now how this time calls us to love, to give now how this time calls us to give, to be the church God creates and the world needs now. Amen.