

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church, Pinole, CA

The Fifth Sunday after Easter: May 7, 2023

“Troubled Hearts”

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Good morning and welcome to the fifth Sunday after Easter. As I am sure some of you noticed, last week’s Psalm number 23, the *Lord is my Shepherd* is one of the regulars on the hit list for funeral readings, and so it is with today’s Gospel as well. I can not even count how many people have struggled to find comfort through their grief in today’s readings where Jesus explains, “Do not let your hearts be troubled.”

Now I have no doubt that these verses and their meanings have long been redacted to fit this very skeletal story, but when you begin to flesh it out with what happened previously, and what will happen next to Jesus, you begin to realize this **is** very comforting scripture.

I am fascinated by the discourse of Jesus in the Upper Room. There are truths here that simply stagger the imagination. Surely this is one of the greatest revelations ever to be recorded of Jesus, and it is at the heart of our faith. We also need to recognize that we read these words and in fact all scripture through the lens of Easter, through knowing of the resurrection.

“Do not let your hearts be troubled.” These words about troubled hearts are not addressed to one disciple alone. The plural is used for here: "Let not your hearts be troubled" includes all the disciples, and can be applied to ourselves.

We can understand why the disciples would be greatly troubled. They were aware of the mounting peril to Jesus, and that the priests and the rulers of the Jews were out to put him to death. Also, they were no doubt ashamed of their own behavior at the table, arguing about who was the greatest until Jesus rebuked them by washing their feet, much to their shame and embarrassment.

Then they were probably uneasy when Jesus declared that one of them was going to betray him. They were confused and puzzled by the sudden exodus of Judas from their midst. They were troubled by Jesus' words that he was about to take his departure, that they would look for him but would see him no more. Anxious foreboding filled their minds.

But in just the simple statement, “Do not let your hearts be troubled”, followed by “believe in God, believe also in me.” Are the words that will keep the disciples and the history of the faithful sustained during hardship and grief for centuries, which Jesus already knew would be the future for every one who could hear his voice.

Jesus is ushering in the New Testament. Belief in the same God, but not in the same way. Jesus is trying to explain, "You have found relief for worry many times in the promises of God."

The disciples and the Jewish people had been sustained in their hardships and grief since the beginning of time. They had the Old Testament, with its rich heritage of wonderful promises, and they had found strength and help from those passages, stories and myths in times of struggle. They had sacrificed the best they had at the altar, as if God kept score on a bank note.

But now Jesus gives them a new truth which goes beyond anything in the Old Testament. He is trying to explain to them "I want you to believe this too," he tells them, "now believe in me."

Jesus tries to give them the big reveal, only to have questions presented to him from his befuddled disciples. Jesus is explaining, get over your fear, listen close, I am going to show you the way, through love, I will die, but I will also show you the truth.

I am God, the Father, immortal here to show you the truth – by you knowing me, you also have life, life everlasting. He is trying to prepare them for Easter morning. For those of you who remember my Easter sermon stating we are here for coverage confidence in eternal life. This is the insurance contract so to speak. Remember we know this because we live in the knowledge of the resurrection.

However the disciples, seem to be confused, even after Easter morning. But to be honest, I am pretty sure I would be like them.

As we contemplate God and try to take in the vastness of this universe, we are astounded at the immensity of it. Our own galaxy is some 300,000 light years across, and there are millions and even billions of such galaxies, stretching out into space and rushing further apart all the time. And as Jesus gazes into the heavens, he says, "In my Father's house, the place where God dwells, 'the heavens and the heaven of heavens,' there are many places to live."

I am sure the disciples thought Jesus was speaking out of his mind, or they could not comprehend what we can so easily see thousands of years later, with a telescope, and as an Easter people, but yet, do we comprehend these statements? Because if you do, they change you, they change your life. Jesus allows us to do what's right, preferably in a loving manner. Jesus shows us truth to power, and also the price it costs.

I would be amiss if I did not bring into today's sermon a brief moment about St Stephen the first deacon of the church.

For as tragic as his story is, I believe it is because his faith was in these words of comfort Jesus spoke before his own death, that allowed Stephen to endure his wrongful end, all while forgiving in love those who tormented him.

We might say we no longer have Jesus to sit at our table and comfort us, or do we? We come to the communion table every Sunday. In the vastness of all there is, one cannot question the possibilities of miracles as something strange. As we see just recently in the news, a sun ate a planet in another galaxy. We can not fathom what our true existence really is, but Jesus knows.

As the rest of the funeral readings go, as we explore our Easter – eternal coverage confidence - we can say, “My Savior Lives and I will know him **not** as a stranger, but as a friend.” I can understand in part what Jesus was saying, to not let this world trouble me, because I am reassured there is so much more. And some days it is easier than others, however, “Do not let your hearts be troubled” is The Gospel for us, is the Good News. Amen