

Sermon | Easter 5
John 14:1-14
10 May 2020

Let Not Your Hearts Be Troubled

Alleluia. Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.
Let not your hearts be troubled. You believe in God. Believe also in me. VERBUM DOMINI.

Let not your hearts be troubled.

Easier said than done, when there is so much to be troubled about. It's Maundy Thursday. Supper is over. And Jesus is talking with his disciples one last time before he takes leave of them, and goes to the Father. I am leaving you, Jesus says. And where I am going, you come. Not now. That was troubling enough. For three years, they went wherever Jesus went, followed him like sheep to a Shepherd. And now he is saying goodbye? Farewell? And they knew, they found out the hard way, just how dangerous life gets when Jesus isn't around. Like being alone in the middle of a sea in the midst of a raging storm.

Let not your hearts be troubled. How can Jesus say this? Especially when St. John says, that his own spirit was troubled. [13:12] "My soul is sorrowful, even unto death," he said. Because he knew, he perceived it with his omniscient divine wisdom, that his hour had come. That the betrayer was there at the table, ready to strike. "One of you will betray me." "Who is it?" they wondered. "Is it you? Is it I?" And to Peter, Simon Peter, who promised the Lord that even if all the others should fall away, he would stick with Jesus even unto death. "Oh no, Peter. Before morning comes, before the rooster crows, you will have denied me three times." Confused, perplexed, bewildered—all of them, very troubled.

Jesus knew this too. He could see it on their faces. He could read it on their hearts. Because he is the God who knows what is in man. So Jesus looked at them and loved them. Loved them enough to comfort them in their trouble. He speak a word of encouragement to strengthen their hearts. Let not your hearts—in the Greek it's more like—stop! Stop being troubled! I know it, I can see it, that you are already troubled. So stop being troubled! And trust me. You believe in God. Believe also in me.

Trust me that I know what I am doing. It will be hard, it will be painful for you to be left alone, and to see what they will do to me. But I have to go it alone. No one else can make this journey. No one else can drink the cup that the Father has assigned his only Son to drink. And I know too that, when you feel the pressure of your life in danger, you will forget my words. You will despair. You will lose hope. You will leave me alone. For just as the Scripture says, strike the Shepherd and the sheep will be scattered.

But stop being troubled, even about this. Think of my Father's house. Not the temple here, in Jerusalem, that's coming down in a few years. That temple is only a copy of the real house, the true house of my Father—which is heaven. In my Father's house are many rooms—not mansions. Don't think of heaven as the sprawling suburbs with everyone spread out. No, one house, many rooms. And you're all in it.

I go there to prepare a place for you. Just like the deacons will be cleansing this place to get it ready for the next service. In the Old Testament the tabernacle and the temple had to be cleansed too. But not with hospital grade cleaner, but with blood. Everything, sprinkled with blood. Because without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins. And the writer to Hebrews tells us that Jesus went to heaven to do that, to cleanse and purify it with his blood, so that it would be ready for all of us.

I go there to prepare a place for you, that where I am, there, you may be also—one with me and the Father and the Spirit forever. So stop being troubled. It's just a little while. I am leaving you. But I will not leave you as orphans. I'm coming right back. Three short days. And I'll come again. Resurrection day.

And when it is your time to depart this life, I will take you to myself. I will receive you into my everlasting arms, just as my servant St. Stephen looked up and saw me standing there with open arms, ready to receive him into my Father's house, so it will be for you. You know the way to where I am going.

And Thomas, in typically grumpy-Thomas fashion, says Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way? Thomas, I AM the Way. And you will know it and confess it soon enough. I am the LORD God. I don't just show you the way to God. I am not a mere road sign pointing out the way, giving directions so that you can find the Way. I AM the Way. And you will travel with me. This Paschal journey that I am about to take out of death and into life—by Baptism, you will take that same journey too. You'll suffer with me. You'll die with me. Even rise with me. And I'll bring you right to the Father.

Now it's Philip's turn. Lord, show us the Father, and that'll be enough for us. Aren't we all like Philip? Wouldn't we all like some proof, some substantial evidence? If God would just show us his face even for a second, wouldn't that permanently cure all our doubts and fears and anxieties? Jesus' answer: you are already looking at him. How long have you been with me Philip, and you still don't get it? That, to see me is to see God? Because I and the Father are one. God is hidden. But I have come into the world to make God known. A mystery hidden for ages is now being revealed in me. And when you see me dying on the cross, you will behold the greatest revelation of the Father's glory and majesty and mercy.

Personally, I've never been comfortable with the statement that God is invisible. Because God has taken up a human body, precisely so that he might become visible. St. John says in his First Epistle, we heard him. We saw him with our eyes. We touched him with our hands. [1 Jn. 1:1] He said that about God. And don't think—don't think! that you have anything less than those twelve disciples did. No. You have a whole lot more. Remember, they were confused and perplexed. They had no idea what was going on or what Jesus was talking about. You know the end of the story. You know where Jesus is going. He's going to the cross. He's going to the tomb. He is coming back to them Easter morning. And then ultimately, after his Ascension into heaven, he comes back for all of us on Last Day to raise us from the dead and to give us life everlasting. You know so much more than those twelve disciples knew before Pentecost.

And, you don't have Jesus any less than they did. They had his visible presence. But you have so much more. You have Jesus in a new way, and an even better way. Because now that he's ascended into heaven, he can be with his whole Church on earth wherever two or three are gathered in his name, there he is in the midst. And here's why I don't like the phrase, God is invisible. Because when the baptismal water splashes over your forehead, that's God. When the bread and the wine touch your lips,

that's God. When the word of Absolution rings out in your ears, that's God. That's Jesus. Where he has promised to be for you. Where he told you that he would be speaking and working and acting to save you from your sins, and strengthen your faith, and give you life forever. In these simple, ordinary means.

So let not your hearts be troubled. It might seem that those words were spoken in vain. Because the disciples did not heed them. Again, as they saw Jesus die, they fell into hopeless despair. And had to be brought out of it by the risen Christ coming to them, speaking his absolving peace. Only then were they glad, when they saw the Lord. It might seem like these words were spoken in vain.

But they were not written down for the disciples. They were written down for you. Because you have many troubles in your life too. The world around us only recognizes the physical dangers to our health and wealth. But as Christians, we know of even greater troubles than Coronavirus, or a sinking economy. We hear the devil's voice in our conscience, reminding us of our sins, tempting us to despair of God's love. We have the world with its many false teachers, trying to deceive us and lead us away from Christ and true doctrine. And perhaps worst of all, we have ourselves, the Old Adam in me, sinful flesh, which has no good in it: no fear, love, or trust in God at all. And because of the sinful flesh, we are quick to forget Christ's word, quick to forget his promises, quick to stop trusting in him, and quick to fall back into a trust and reliance on ourselves—our strength, our abilities, our works.

Which is why you need to hear this Word again, and again, and again, throughout your life. This comforting word, encouraging word, pure Gospel word of Jesus. Let not your hearts be troubled. Trust in him. He is the Way. He know the way. And has gone the Way. Pascal journey, dying for you, rising for you, going into heaven—his Father's house to get it ready for you. And he is coming again to take to himself. That where he is, there you may be also. And in the meantime, we sing.

At the Lamb's High Feast, we sing. Amen.

VOTUM.