

“LET NOT YOUR HEARTS BE TROUBLED”

John 14:1-7
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At first blush, it sounds like one of the least helpful things Jesus ever said:

“Let not your hearts be troubled” . . .

--especially when one realizes Where and When he said it

Jesus offers this counsel to a roomful of disciples, reeling at the news he is about to be snatched away by betrayal and death

--to tell these shell-shocked souls, “Let not your hearts be troubled,”
borders on
pastoral malpractice

It's like telling someone with a broken neck to keep their chin up

And what about all those profoundly impacted by this pandemic?

Are those who have lost a job, or a loved one, or their security and self-respect, expected to limp along without a troubled heart?

--what about the families of medical personnel, first responders, and service people who like Jesus, have “laid down their lives for their friends”?

Meanwhile, our country is poised to split along familiar partisan & cultural lines over When and How to reopen the economy

--a Family Dollar employee in Michigan was shot and killed after asking a customer to wear a face mask and two McDonalds employees were shot for the same reason

While in Georgia, an African-American jogger was run down & gunned down by a self-appointed white posse

--surely *your* heart is troubled by all this loss and violence

I know mine is

When I first saw the Gospel text for this day, I envisioned a nice, placid sermon about the joys of romping around in the “Father’s House”

But as this week unfolded, and I saw the pain and injustice breaking out all around -- and not just in the news but in the lives of people we know and love -- I just couldn't get over my own troubled heart

--so I decided to bring it here -- to church -- and ask Jesus what to do with it

The Swiss-born psychiatrist and author, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, told about a mother whose child had just died in the hospital

Seeing the anguish in the woman's face, Dr. Kubler-Ross said, "You look like you're in such pain that you might scream"

--the woman blurted out -- in all seriousness -- "Do you have a screaming room in the hospital?"

“No,” Kübler-Ross answered, “but have a chapel”

That turned out to be the wrong answer as immediately, the heartsick mother replied,

"I need just the opposite. I need to scream and rage and curse. I've just been sitting in the parking lot and cursing and screaming at God. 'God why did you let this happen to my child? Why did you let this happen to me'?"

--taking her hand, Dr. Kübler-Ross said softly, "Do it here. It's better to do it with somebody than out in a parking lot all alone

But what if the church – or at least, *this* church – is a safe place to be brutally honest with God and one another about how badly our heart is broken or troubled?

Might that be the beginning of finding the hope and strength we need?

In all events, I know Jesus well enough – and you know Jesus well enough – to know that his invitation, “Let not your hearts be troubled,” is not some kind of pious cliché . . .

Because we know from this Gospel that Jesus’ heart was troubled too

–three times before his solemn pronouncement in chp 14, this very word, troubled, is used of Jesus

First at the grave of Lazarus (Jn 11:33), then when he faces his betrayer at the Last Supper (Jn 13:21), and finally, when the specter of his cross draws near

–“Now my heart is troubled,” cries Jesus. “And what should I say — ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour” (Jn 12:27)

So far from offering cheap words of comfort, maybe Jesus has learned something about surviving a troubled heart he wants to share with us

Maybe he knows a troubled heart is a place we all have to visit

—but it is not a good place to settle down and live

“Believe in God,” Jesus continues, “and also in me”

As Diana Butler Bass reminds us in her book, *Christianity after Religion*, the English word “believe” comes from the German “belieben” — the German word for love

–to believe, especially in this Gospel, is not to hold an opinion about Jesus or even to ably recite the church’s creeds

No, to believe in Jesus is to love Jesus, to trust Jesus, and to believe — as he taught us — that God is the loving, faithful, ever attentive Father and Mother of us all

Then to his call to believe, Jesus adds a word of hope:

“In my Father’s house are many mansions. 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. (Jn 14:2-3_)

Unfortunately, that truly regrettable translation, *mansions*, is seared into the popular imagination by the King James English

–the more accurate rendering – as you can see by looking at any modern translation of the Bible – is not mansions, but “dwelling places” or “rooms”

Because Heaven is not a place where you get a posh mansion on the back 9 of an other-worldly golf course and sip lemonade – or something stronger! – on the porch

–heaven is wherever Jesus draws you into deeper fellowship with himself

Be that in the Life to Come where he is getting a room ready in his Daddy’s Place just for you

–of in the Life that is Now Yours to Live as Jesus sidles up beside you in faithfulness and love

For my mother – God bless her soul – Jesus was her ever-present companion, even as she savored his promise of preparing a place just for her

One night, when I was keeping vigil at her hospital bed, shortly before she died, I was overwhelmed by the discomfort and indignity of her sickness and decline

“Mom,” I said, not even sure if she was listening, “Don’t you wish sometimes Jesus would just show up in the flesh and make you well?”

--she stirred, then paused to ponder the question

Then she swallowed hard, smiled faintly, and whispered thru parched lips,

“It’s enough that he’s here with me now”

And that, I suppose, is why Jesus tells a bunch of broken-hearted disciples,

“Let not your hearts be troubled”

It’s because he doesn’t want the “troubled heart” to be all there is

--instead, he wants to take our sick, worried hearts in his strong, loving hands and
and transfuse them with life and hope and healing

So he offers not just advice

--he offers himself: “Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you.

So do not let your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid” (John 14:27)

But Jesus is not done with us yet

He also invites us into his mission so we don’t have to feel so helpless in the face of
the world’s anguish and need

“A new commandment give I unto you: that you love one another as I have loved you” (John 13:34)

--and that is why at the center of this pandemic there is a place where Jesus’ folk
yet show up to feed their neighbors at the Bolton Food Pantry

And Jesus’ people yet wheel meals to hungry seniors who delight in a warm smile --
offered at a safe social distance -- almost as much as a hot meal

--and others of Jesus’ followers skip watching the news so they can make the
news sewing masks to help keep at risk people safe and alive

Some of Jesus’ brothers and sisters regularly call the most isolated and vulnerable members
of our church and even buy groceries for their home-bound neighbors, leaving
them as a gift of love on the porch

And thank God for those fire-breathing Jesus types -- who like him, know a corrupt religious,
political system when they see it -- who denounce violence or the threat of violence
wherever extremists seek to intimidate, divide, and destroy

At the first virtual deacons meeting after the stay-at-home order went into place, one
of our deacons drew on the work of C. S. Lewis in her devotional

She quoted from a time when the fear of nuclear annihilation was gripping the world

Lewis wrote

(When people ask), “How are we to live in an atomic age?” I am tempted to reply: “Why, as you would have lived in the 16th century when the plague visited London almost every year,
or as you would have lived in a Viking age when raiders from Scandinavia might land and cut your throat any night . . .

“In other words,” Lewis continued, “(do not exaggerate) the novelty of our situation. . . . *The first action . . . is to pull ourselves together.*

“If we are all going to be destroyed by an atomic bomb, let that bomb when it comes find us doing sensible and human things -- praying, working, teaching, reading, listening to music, bathing the children . . . not huddled together like frightened sheep and thinking about bombs.

“Let not your hearts be troubled”

Or at least, “Do not let that be all there is”

--rather, steeled by the assurance of the Risen One’s Presence in life and in death,
let’s begin *by pulling ourselves together*

For only as we draw on his strength and grace and goodness to calm our
troubled hearts,
can we rise to our sacred calling to share and live the Good News of Jesus

For never have our friends, or family members, or world needed him
more than now

*O holy Christ, who knows well the contours of the troubled heart, draw near
in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.*

Create a sense of your calm at the center of every storm.

*Then from that new center, lead us to follow you in the way of truth and
life.*

*For never has our world needed an new infusion of your truth and life
more than now. Amen.*

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