

May 10, 2020  
New Song Episcopal Church  
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(All lectionary passages are included below the sermon text.)

## **Do Not Let Your Hearts Be Troubled**

First off, I would like to wish a very Happy Mother's Day to all mothers. That is often a thankless job and you deserve far more than just a day to commemorate your hard work and dedication. Thank you. You are appreciated!

In the middle of this COVID-19-induced weirdness, Jesus's first sentence in today's Gospel resonated with me. "Do not let your hearts be troubled." He's called the Prince of Peace for a reason. We all benefit when we embrace that peace and let it infuse our souls.

What is this place that he is preparing for us? Where is it?

I can't answer that completely in this short sermon; it's a question theologians have argued about for ages. However, I will present one possibility for us to consider today.

It's a place of peace. Peace deep within ourselves, even in the midst of turmoil. It's that moment when our hearts are crying out, "How long, O Lord?" and suddenly a wave sweeps over us and we feel a sense of calm despite nothing having changed externally. The chaos still exists, but suddenly we have peace even in the storm.

This is a place that Jesus has prepared for us. Like Thomas, we look at this idea

and respond, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?”

Jesus said, “I am the way.”

Huh. That still feels unclear to me. How about you? It did to Philip, who basically said, “Just show God to us and we’ll be fine.”

But, if we’ve seen Jesus, we’ve seen God, he says.

I think the next word after Jesus’s first sentence gives us a sign post. “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe...”

Believe. Trust. Have confidence in. Accept something as true. Feel certainty.

Believing in what we cannot see, feel, or prove is not natural to any of us.

Because of that, we often get down on ourselves, criticizing ourselves for our lack of faith. That’s not necessary.

A wise person once told me that our first reaction is not our true self, but rather our training. We have all been trained by how we grew up, what we have experienced in life, perhaps our disappointments, frustrations, or even traumas. Something happens in front of us and our initial response is based on those past events. And this is where we become self-critical. “I’m such a \_\_\_\_\_.” Fill in the blank.

Our true self, however, is how we choose to be after that initial reaction subsides. We may initially respond out of fear or anger or doubt, but then we decide, “No. I’m going to do this instead of follow that.”

That second response is who you really are, because it's who you *choose* to be.

How is Jesus the way? It starts with his example, given for us to follow. The best way to know and understand that example is to study him. How did Jesus react to people? What did he say? What did he do? How can I adjust my life to follow that example? When is it okay to grab a whip and turn over the tables of money changers and when should I instead stand quietly and not respond to my accusers? What are the values behind these actions?

It's not perfection we are seeking, it's Jesus. I want to be kind. I want to be gentle. I also want to know the power I have and use it the right way at the right time.

Jesus said, "...the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it."

The last time I preached on this Gospel passage, on the same Sunday in the church calendar, but in 2014, I mentioned growing up in a Pentecostal church and being taught a very different understanding of today's Gospel. That point of view says that the entirety of Scripture should be seen through the lens of supernatural power lending aid to true believers, to equip them in a militaristic spiritual form of focus to battle Satan and to take dominion of the Earth, to rescue the lost and deceived, often through

miraculous signs and wonders.

I don't scoff at miracles. On the contrary, I believe they exist.

I don't deny the supernatural. I've seen things that have no natural explanation.

But, when you read this passage only through that lens, you miss what I think is the true beauty of what Jesus is saying.

What did Jesus do? Well, from how I grew up we were trained to respond that he healed the sick, fed the multitudes, cast out demons, and even raised the dead.

What I didn't really understand until later was that he also cared for the outcasts, talked to a Samaritan woman, touched lepers, wept over the loss of a friend, cast money changers out of the temple, spoke up on behalf of widows, of the poor, of the oppressed. He taught about love and grace, mercy and hope, sacrificing yourself to help others.

Jesus made God look good. He "glorified" God. He caused God to be seen favorably through his words and deeds.

You know what impresses me? Treating people well, loving the despised, sticking up for the bullied and oppressed, giving to people who need help so that they can live and thrive rather than just struggle to survive.

Large meetings don't impress me. Flamboyant speakers don't impress me. Chaotic scenes don't impress me.

A still, small voice deep inside that gives me peace impresses me.

In my opinion, when we look at Jesus and try to do the things that he did, it changes us. Our outlook changes. Our perceptions change. Gradually, our hearts are no longer troubled over ourselves and what is going on, rather our hearts are moved with compassion for those around us.

Therein lies peace and the path to God, and frankly, it sounds a lot like a mother.

Amen.

## **The First Lesson**

### **Acts 7:55-60**

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Stephen gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. "Look," he said, "I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him. Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he died.

## **The Response**

### **Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16**

#### ***In te, Domine, speravi***

- 1 In you, O LORD, have I taken refuge;  
let me never be put to shame; \*  
deliver me in your righteousness.
- 2 Incline your ear to me; \*  
make haste to deliver me.
- 3 Be my strong rock, a castle to keep me safe,  
for you are my crag and my stronghold; \*  
for the sake of your Name, lead me and guide me.
- 4 Take me out of the net that they have secretly set for me, \*  
for you are my tower of strength.
- 5 Into your hands I commend my spirit, \*

for you have redeemed me,  
O LORD, O God of truth.

15 My times are in your hand; \*  
rescue me from the hand of my enemies,  
and from those who persecute me.

16 Make your face to shine upon your servant, \*  
and in your loving-kindness save me."

## **The Epistle**

### **1 Peter 2:2-10**

Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation— if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in scripture:

"See, I am laying in Zion a stone,  
a cornerstone chosen and precious;  
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."

To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe,

"The stone that the builders rejected  
has become the very head of the corner",

and

"A stone that makes them stumble,  
and a rock that makes them fall."

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Once you were not a people,  
but now you are God's people;  
once you had not received mercy,  
but now you have received mercy.

## **The Gospel**

### **John 14:1-14**

Jesus said, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. 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 him, “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. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.”