

Sermons at St. Luke's

A sermon preached by The Rev. Joseph H. Hensley, Jr. Sunday, May 22, 2011.

(Acts 7:55-60; I Peter 2:2-10; John 14:1-14)

Jesus says to his disciples, "Do not let your hearts be troubled." On the night before he is to be betrayed, Jesus says, "Do not let your hearts be troubled." On the night before he is to be denied, "Do not let your hearts be troubled." On the night before he is to be put on the cross to die, Jesus says to his disciples, "Do not let your hearts be troubled." I don't whether to say "Alleluia" or "What are you talking about, Jesus?" Clearly, the disciples comes down on the side of "What are you talking about, Jesus?" Jesus has just dropped a major bomb on these guys. They've been following him, learning from him. They've gathered together for what they thought was going to be a Passover meal, and Jesus starts acting all strange, washing their feet, saying weird things like, "I'm going away. I'm not going to be with you, and you can't follow me just now." And also, "One of you will betray me and one of you will deny me. But don't let your hearts be troubled." Too late. Too late, Jesus.

Thomas raises his hand quickly, but Jesus tries to reassure them and say, "You know the way to where I'm going and you'll follow me there eventually." And Thomas says, "Wait a minute, Lord. What way are you talking about?" This is, of course, before the doubting Thomas scene after Jesus was resurrected. I don't think of Thomas so much as a doubter as a – he's a fact checker. He's like the guy that raises his hand in class and says, "Now, this wasn't on the review sheet. If you mentioned anything about a 'way,' I'm not remembering that very clearly, Lord." And Philip, also, is wanting a sign. "Now, Lord, just show us God and we'll be fine, okay? You can just show us God, give us that sign, we'll be all right." The disciples are looking for certainty. They're looking for specific directions, instructions. Just give me something I can hang my hat on.

Can we empathize? We, too, look to God when our hearts are troubled. And our hearts are troubled. For all kinds of reasons, our hearts are troubled. Family members who are ill, injustice that plagues our world; our hearts are troubled. People who are hungry; our hearts are troubled. Situations that have no clear answer, tough decisions that must be made; our hearts are troubled, and we are looking for those clear directions. I think we sometimes want God to be something like a spiritual GPS. We put in the destination and then here come the directions in the nice little voice that says, "Turn left. Turn right. You're off the track." But instead, the voice that comes to us, the message that comes to us, says, "You already know the way." We put in the destination, we say, "Tell us where to go," and the voice says, "You already know the way." What?

Jesus responds to our troubled hearts and says, "I am the way, the truth and the life. You already know the way if you know me. I am the directions." And Jesus adds, "No one comes to the Father except through me." And I want to take a little detour, speaking of directions, for just a moment on that particular statement. Because a lot of times we interpret that to mean only the good Jesus followers will see God and enter heaven, "No one comes to the Father except through me." But I think what Jesus is getting at in this statement is not any kind of statement about separation, about who's in and who's out. Jesus is actually talking about unification. Jesus is saying that "I am so close to the Father, I am one with the Father so that if you see God, you're going to run into me. I am the way, the truth and the life because I am with God." So it's not that only those who follow Christ will find God, it's that all who seek God will find Christ. All who seek God will find that revelation of God in human form saying, "I am the way, the truth and the life." That form of God who leads us into that unity, who invites us into that relationship with God.

But we want something a little bit more tangible, something that we can hang our hats on. Come on, Jesus, give us a little bit more. How do we know you? I mean, your disciples, they didn't get it. And it's interesting, we've got this whole Easter theme of the disciples asking these questions over and over again, and what they're looking for is right there in front of them. It's staring them in the face and they're still like, "Where is it? Where's the 'way'?" And Jesus is like, "Right here. The 'way' is not over there someplace. The path is not out there someplace. The path is right here."

So the question is for us how do we know the way, the truth and the life? In his letter that we read from this morning, Peter uses this wonderful image of living stones, living stones that are built into a spiritual house. And I might try and extend that metaphor and say those living stones are also used to pave the path. We are the paving stones on the way. When we cry out with our troubled hearts, when we cry out with the psalmist of Psalm 31, "Lord, be my refuge; Lord, shelter me from the storm," where is the shelter? Instead of pointing over there somewhere, God says, "Look right in front of you. You are the shelter. You are the living stones that have been built into a fortress so that when the storms come, you all are the shelter for one another. You all are the way through Christ. You know the way."

When we gather in this place, when we worship at this table and share bread and wine, we know the way. When we go out of here and minister to the sick and the hungry and the homeless and the friendless, we know the way. When we reach out to one another, when we comfort one another in difficult times, we know the way. When we stand up for justice, we know the way. Any time we act as the body of Christ, as living stones, we know the way. Christ says that whenever we do the works that He did, we know the way. And He says we'll do greater works than these. How? I don't always know. Where? I'm not always sure. When? In God's good time.

Our troubled hearts are looking for those specific answers, looking for definite directions, and sometimes God gives us that. But God is offering us something deeper and richer than a spiritual GPS. God is offering us Christ, God's own self, an invitation to be one with God through Christ. And we do that by being together. God offers us one another in community, in love, to join in Christ-like communion. So what is the way? When two or three are gathered together in Jesus' name. What is the truth? The truth is that when our hearts are troubled, we are never alone. What is the life? Life together in Christ in loving service to one another. Living stones built into a shelter that can weather all storms. Do not let our hearts be troubled. We know the way.