Sermon for the Fifth Sunday of Easter

May 10, 2020

John 14:1-14

One of the things I’ve heard from a lot of people these past few weeks is that they’re tired. Which is often followed by, “I’m not really sure why, since it’s not like I’m going anywhere.”

Many of us have found that we’re more irritable, that we’re having trouble focusing, that we’re more easily distracted.

While at first it seemed like a dream come true for a lot of kids to not have to go to school, and a lot of adults were happy to not have to make long commutes or have to be as dressed up as normal, these last several weeks are taking a toll on us, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. And the longer we live physically distant from each other, the worse it gets.

If there’s anything about the past couple months that we can qualify as normal, our bundle of emotions and our weariness are it. It is absolutely normal to feel all these things. Why? Because we’re grieving. We’re dealing with an ongoing traumatic event. And because we have very little idea of when it’ll all be over.

To this, perhaps Jesus would say the same thing he said to the disciples: “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.”

In John’s gospel, Jesus is all about relationship. “Abide in me as I abide in you,” he says. When we’re in a relationship with someone, a *real* relationship, that means we’re in it together through good and bad. When a couple gets married, we don’t ask if they will be together only during the good things, when there’s enough money and everybody’s healthy, but if they’ll also be together in times when they lack money or times when things are bad.

Our readings today all remind us that a relationship with God is about *all* of the times in our lives, not just the good ones. They remind us that God meets us in our vulnerability, accompanies us through it, and loves us through it.

Jesus spoke these words to his disciples because they were scared. This passage is from what scholars call Jesus’ farewell discourse, chapters 14-17 of John’s Gospel. Jesus had just washed his disciples’ feet. He’d told them that he knew one of them would betray him, then handed a piece of bread to Judas, demonstrating that he knew it would be Judas to do it.

The disciples were scared. They were uncertain. And they had precious little idea of what was coming.

Rather than dismissing their fears as unnecessary or unimportant, Jesus kept it simple as he reassured them: “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in me, believe also in God, and remember what you’ve seen.”

Thomas’ words, “How do we know where you’re going? How do we know the way”? are words that I think we can all relate to right now. Even though Jesus had just said, “You know the way to the place that I’m going,” Thomas’ words show us the fear and uncertainty of Jesus’ followers. Thomas was in danger of forgetting the things he’d seen, the things Jesus had said to them.

But remember: This is the same Thomas who would insist upon proof, insist he get to see Jesus, or he wouldn’t believe what the others said, and then confidently declare, “My Lord and my God!” upon seeing Jesus.

We’re all going to have good days and bad days. We’re all going to have days when we can go forward, confident in our faith, and we’re all going to have days when our anxieties threaten to overwhelm us, and God feels distant.

Perhaps that’s why Jesus kept it simple. “Don’t let your hearts be troubled. Believe in me, believe also in God.” And why he told them to remember what they’d *seen,* knowing they might not always remember what he *said.*

Keeping things simple when life threatens to overwhelm us is a good idea. I used to give kids graduating high school a book, *Keep Calm and Carry a Banana: The Wisdom of Curious George,* because it reminds us to keep things simple. Help others. Be kind. Don’t swallow puzzle pieces. And if you do, don’t be anxious, but get someone to help you.

Keeping things simple when we’re anxious doesn’t mean things aren’t going to be complicated, and it doesn’t mean we aren’t going to have to figure out how to navigate the troubles of life. But when we remember Jesus’ words – “Believe in me, believe also in God” – we ground ourselves in the heart of our faith, instead of having hearts troubled by uncertainty and fear.

Once we’ve done that, once we’ve rooted ourselves in the essence of what it means to be a Christian, we can find the peace that only comes from God. Real peace, which doesn’t depend upon all our troubles disappearing, but rests in the promises of God.

And then we can go forward, confident of God’s presence in our lives, remembering how God has provided for us in the past, and we can meet the challenges life throws at us.

When everything else in life is upended and full of uncertainty, finding one thing to trust in, one thing to be confident of, is essential. For us, that one thing is our faith.

When our faith is at the heart of our lives, everything else flows out from it, and we find the peace that God offers us in the midst of an uncertain, turbulent world.

Wherever you are, wherever life takes you, may you find comfort in your faith, and may it strengthen you and keep your heart from being troubled.