

Acts 7:55-60
1 Peter 2:2-10
John 14:1-14
Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16

The Fifth Sunday of Easter
St. Barnabas Bainbridge Island
May 10th, 2020
The Rev. Karen Haig

Do Not Let Your Hearts Be Troubled

There is little I delight in more than watching my son with his son. Simon and I talk sometimes about the things he and Cooper like to do together, many of them things we liked to do too. Among the favorites – finding crabs at the beach, digging in dirt, pouring water from the watering pitcher into a bucket, playing with trains and reading stories. Some of Cooper’s favorite things are books and stories.

I remember very well reading stories to my little boy, especially bedtime stories. Every night we read stories and said blessings, and every night I sang lullabies until his tired little eyes reluctantly closed and he began to drift off to sleep. It was then I would whisper to him that I loved him, that his daddy loved him, and that the world was a better place because he was here. Tugging on the switch of his little bedside airplane lamp, I would kiss his forehead and whisper “Honey, I love you more than breathing.” And I did. I still do.

Simon grew into a beautiful young man, and when it was time to plan for college, he was set on going to Boston. The east coast is a long way away. I had known this time was coming, I had known Simon would leave, and since his college acceptance, I had known he was going about as far away as I could imagine. Still, I was thrilled for him. He was thrilled. His dad was thrilled, his friends were thrilled... But when it was time for Simon to leave for college, I was so sick that I was confined to the living room, spending entire days on the couch, unable even to walk up the stairs to my bedroom. I probably should have been in the hospital, but I couldn’t bear to miss those last precious days at home with him. Even though I was home with, I couldn’t help Simon pack, couldn’t help him get ready to go, and I certainly couldn’t take him to college as we had always planned. I had contracted bronchitis, asthma and pneumonia – all at once, and all for the first time. Simon, the one I loved more than breathing, was leaving home... and I couldn’t breathe.

Leavings can be heart wrenching. And this heart wrenching place is precisely where we encounter the disciples in today’s gospel passage. Yes, we’re in the season of Easter, but today we’ve gone back to Maundy Thursday, to that last evening Jesus had with his friends. It was a very confusing time. Jesus had washed the disciple’s feet, to show them that the way of servanthood was the way of love. He had held up bread, and said it was his body being given for them; held up wine and called it his blood of a new covenant. He had spoken of betrayal in one breath - and love in the next. He had insisted, that no matter what, they must love one another. And after all that, he told them for the last time, he was going away and going to die.

The disciples were bereft. The impending death of their beloved rabbi didn’t mean just losing master and friend... It meant losing everything - everything they had struggled to believe, everything they had dreamed, everything they had worked so hard to create, the life that had made them a part of something so much bigger than they’d ever imagined, a life that made

them feel like they belonged. They had left everything behind – given up friends and families and lives as peaceful fishermen because they thought they were building the Kingdom of Heaven. And it was all about to fall apart. Of course their hearts were troubled. So that’s where Jesus began...

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.”

That’s what Jesus offered in response to their troubled and broken hearts – belief. It’s an interesting invitation at this time in their journey together. Just as the failed mission is revealed, just as Jesus is about to be betrayed by Judas and denied by Peter, just as the disciples wonder and worry about what will happen to them... just as everything is coming apart, Jesus says “believe.” Believe that I will go ahead of you and make a place for you. Believe that I’ll return for you and call you to myself. Believe that even though I am leaving we will always be together because in my Father’s house there are many abiding places, places for all of you. “Where I am, you will be also” he told them. It’s what he tells us too. “Where I am, you will be also.”

You see, with Jesus, place is not about location. When Thomas said “We don’t know where you’re going, how can we know the way?” Jesus didn’t give directions about how to get to heaven or commence explaining eternal life. He simply said “I am the way.” I am the way. Place is not about location. Place is about relationship. “In my father’s house there are many abiding places” ... “Abide in me,” ... “Abide in my love...”

We hear this language of place-as-relationship in 1st Peter too. “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.” *1 Peter 2:5* We ourselves are the stones, the living, breathing building blocks that will build a spiritual house, with Jesus as the cornerstone and the Father as the householder. We, all of us, are being built into A place where there is room for everyone to abide in God, in the household of God. We, all of us, are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people...called out of darkness and into God’s marvelous light. The darkness we’ve been called out of is the darkness of loneliness, hopelessness and despair. The marvelous light we are called into is the light of relationships, of abiding in love, of belonging to God and to each other. That is good to hear in these strange days of self-quarantine and social isolation.

These days, our relationships can feel pretty different. Some of us are reaching out and connecting with people we haven’t connected with in years, rekindling friendships and family connections. And some of us are feeling abandoned and alone, a bit lost without the physical presence of a wider community. Some of our hearts are troubled, and some of us are afraid. But the promise that we abide in God as God abides in us, that we are living stones, with God building our community into a spiritual house, a royal priesthood, a holy nation; the promise that we are God’s own beloved people...

these are promises we can count on. And they are promises made to us by the God who came to be with us, to become us, the God who knew loneliness and heartache and sorrow and suffering, just as we do.

Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid... When Jesus spoke those beautiful, encouraging words, it was at a time of great uncertainty, a time when it looked as though the possibility of life in God was coming to an end. I am with you, Jesus said, I will always be with you. Nothing can ever separate us, nothing ever will. So you see, even though we can't be together physically, we have the promise of the God who loves us, that we are together, that we will always be together, because we abide in God and in each other.

About a week after Simon left for college, I was finally well enough to travel. I flew to Boston and arrived in time for Parent's weekend. When Simon took me to his dorm, I saw how beautifully he had settled himself in, how well he had acclimated to his surroundings... and all that without having his mother close at hand. He had found his place, here in this new abode. Looking around at his familiar things in these unfamiliar surroundings, I spotted a picture of the two of us he'd brought from home. When tears welled up in my eyes, Simon put his arm around my shoulder and said "You're always with me mom, no matter where we are."

That's how it is with Jesus. No matter where we are, he is always going before us, always with us, always inviting us into deeper and richer belonging. God grant us the grace of open minds and tender hearts to live into our belonging - to God - and to each other. Amen.