

Advent Lutheran Church - Westminster Colorado
Sunday, May 10, 2020 Fifth Sunday of Easter
Sermon based on John 14:1-14 - Pastor Barb Martens
5.10.20

You know sometimes you have to wonder. Sometimes it's interesting how things come full circle. And for those of us who are preachers, this wondering usually turns into a sermon. Today is Mother's Day, 2020. And this Mother's Day, most of us aren't able to be with our mothers because of the social distancing and the stay-at-home orders. It's been going on for a long time and we're all a little tired of it. So we will make contact the best way we can.

For me, the extraordinary circumstance of this day is that 30 years ago, almost to the day, the words of today's Gospel text were spoken at my mother's funeral. And in the 26 years that I've been doing this job, I have read these words over and over again at other people's funerals. Some of them have been people that you have loved because I've had the privilege of walking with you through life and death. So we've shared these words together and they are words that bond us together. And just as Jesus is facing the sight of His own grave, (in the book of John He knows what's coming) He is trying to prepare his closest friends for what's going to happen in the days ahead. He says these words to them. "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God. Believe also in me."

Now, I don't know about you, but I also remember 30 years ago at my mom's funeral and every relative that I've buried since, my heart was very troubled. And I remember how it felt to hear these words, and my first reaction was, "Yeah, I'm troubled because somebody I love is not with me anymore." But she is with me. She is with me now just as you are all together now, even though we are in separate places and separated from each other.

When we talk about our darkest times, this is a time in our history that we have never experienced before. There's been nothing to compare it to. And yet it comes at a time when we have technology that can pull us together and we all know it's not the same. It's not the same as being able to hug each other. It's not the same as being able to shake hands. And it's going to be a very long time before we get back to that. There's a kind of death in that separation, and yet we pull together around these traditions nevertheless. These words remind us that no matter what happens, we are going to be together again.

But this passage is not about death. It's not *only* about death. It's about life. And it's about now. Jesus says to His disciples, as He's getting ready to physically depart from them, "Believe in me, believe also in my Father." Now in the book of John, the word *believe* almost exclusively is not used as something that's inward... 'do you *believe*'...but it's an outward... an active commitment to a person named Jesus.

In Luther's large catechism, in his explanation of the first commandment, he says, "God is what you hang your heart upon." So even the heart that is troubled can hang their heart on the love of God. Upon Jesus Christ. The one who is giving these words to His disciples.

And so you say, "How do we do that?" But Jesus tells us that. He says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." And if you believe, and you follow, you will find that that is very true.

Let's talk about these things. The light, the truth, and the way. So, during these times when we live with a constant, kind of nagging fear...when we wait to hear who the next person we know is going to be ill, but feeling safe in our homes hopefully, the light of Jesus Christ becomes so much more powerful because there is darkness all around us. And that light comes to us to show us the things that are lurking in the dark. To keep us from living in fear, so that we blame each other and other people.

The light shines on that darkness and tells us that we don't need to be afraid because God is with us. And whatever happens, God will be with us. Light shows us the dark in all the things that the world tells you you need to do. And He says, because of His light, we can see the good that's in the world and not stay focused on the bad. That's what the light does for us. He says He's the light and He's the truth. And the truth stands out when light is shined on it. There's a lot of untruth going around. We don't even know what to believe. Scientists aren't even completely sure about what's happening. But we can believe in the truth of Jesus Christ. We can believe that every action we take that protects the most vulnerable of our sisters and brothers is a work of love and a work of light. That's what it means to believe. It means acting out of knowing that God goes with us. And not stupidly, but acting as if God's love calls us to something else.

And then the way. Jesus Christ tells us that He is the way. And we can just brush that off...as, if you believe in Jesus, you'll go to heaven...but that's not what Jesus is talking about. Jesus is talking about a life He lived on earth teaching us about how to live and love everyone around us, especially the most vulnerable, especially the people who are outside of the circle. Following Jesus means that way, calls us to always look at ourselves, and always say 'how, in this time, in this day am I following the way of Jesus Christ?' It won't get you to heaven, we don't believe that. But if you believe that heaven is there, and that a place is prepared for you, and you take that into your heart, you believe it, and you act on it. And acting on it means following the lessons and words that Jesus Christ left us while He was on earth.

He even says it in verse 12, "The one who believes in me, will also do the works that I will do." And they will do greater works. Because we follow Christ, because we do what Christ did, because we dare to ask ourselves, "How does Christ want us to act in this circumstance?" We live out the love of God in ways that change the world. And don't ever doubt that. That love calls us every day to look at how we can love better. And that love accepts ourselves as beloved children of God just for who we are right now. That love makes life worth living, worth fighting for. And it makes the effort worth fighting for the life of those around us.

Today is Mother's Day. And the woman who first taught me about love, imperfect as she was, and *still* teaches me about love, lives in my heart. Because I know that Christ prepared the way for her. And Christ prepares the way for me. Think of the love of your mother. The woman that carried you. The woman that gave life to you. This is a day to do that. And think about how Jesus is in all of that. Because Christ calls us to love. Christ calls us to trust. Christ calls us to the way, the truth, and the life. And in that light and life and way and truth, we can love even in this darkness.

And in that, as we gather together, however we gather together...as we hold each other, even if it's in our hearts and minds and thoughts and prayers, that brings us all full circle back to the empty tomb of Jesus, which helps us believe that there is never a tomb that is not empty because of Christ's sacrifice. What a gift that is. What a way to celebrate the mother God, the mother of us and of our children. Our mothers are celebrated because of love. And that brings us full circle.

Amen