

Jim Gordon Holy Faith May 26, 2019 Acts 16:9-15 Psalm 67
Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5 John 14: 23-29

This being Memorial Day weekend, I want to begin with a moment of silence for those who, to borrow Lincoln's words, gave their lives that the nation might live.

Thank you.

In the name of God — Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

"Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."

As I hear those words, I think about Jesus' disciples, and wonder what went through their minds as they heard them in the upper room on the night of Jesus' betrayal and arrest.

"Let not your hearts be troubled"?

Lord, I can hear them say, we groan under oppression by the Romans, aided and abetted by our religious leaders, who've been seeking to destroy you for three years. We've had to look over our shoulders ever since we began following you, and now you've just told us you are leaving, are going to be tortured and crucified. You've told us we're going to be scattered. You've told us we will be thrown out of the synagogue. You've told us that people seeking to kill us will do so thinking they're doing a service for God.

"Let not your hearts be troubled"? How is that possible?

In the beginning of Chapter 14 of John's Gospel, Jesus tells them the first step.

“Believe in God,” he says, “believe also in me.”

But Jesus makes clear that belief entails more than intellectual assent, more than just the words “I believe.” Belief means obedience.

“If a man loves me,” Jesus says, “he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”

What a beautiful sentence. What a beautiful image. The Father and the Son making your home their home.

And when your home is their home, then you can begin to understand Jesus’ plea: “Let not your hearts be troubled.”

Despite these words, in the hours following, the hearts of Jesus’ disciples would be troubled, and afraid, and they would desert their Lord. The next day, with the exception of young John, they would not even bear witness to his crucifixion. Then they would hide, afraid to open the door for fear of the religious authorities.

But God would fulfill Jesus’ promise and send the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, to teach the disciples all things and bring to their remembrance all that Jesus said to them.

And that would change everything, for the disciples, and through them, for the world.

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you,” Jesus tells them.

Note that Jesus doesn’t promise his disciples a smooth ride, a life without conflict. As we know, for his chosen followers it would be just the opposite. But not one of the remaining 11 — not one — would fall away. Their hearts and faith were steady.

I thought of that the other day as I picked up a Richard Rohr book that I'm reading. I turned to the page where I had left off weeks ago and my eyes fell on this line, which I had highlighted at my last reading, which was a chapter on prayer. The line is this: "You rest in God, not in outcomes."

Now, those are words that need to be parsed.

Ultimately, we do rest in outcomes in the sense that we rest in the truth of Christ's resurrection and ascension, and in the hope of our own journey to God and our resurrection.

But as we go through life and pray for this to happen or for that to not happen in our everyday existence, we do not rest in those outcomes. Life is uncertain and capricious. We place our trust above the everyday events of this life.

In that sense, we rest not in outcomes, but in God.

And that is a good thing, because as the disciples had a fearful backdrop to Jesus' words, "Let not your hearts be troubled," so do we.

In our world, we see violence, inequality, oppression, greed, rancor, political posturing and bickering, problems of immigration, problems of crime, problems of abortion, an increase in homelessness. The threat of climate change.

In all of that and more, not to mention upheavals in our own individual lives, we see plenty to cause us worry and grief.

And yet Jesus says to us, as he said to the 11 in the Upper Room, "Let not your hearts be troubled."

And the other words he said to the disciples, he also says to us:

“Believe in God, believe also in me.” And again, belief is more than saying the words, “I believe.” Belief entails obedience, entails keeping Christ’s words so that he and the Father will come and make their home with you.

Now, through the water of Baptism, you have received the Holy Spirit. I doubt it was as dramatic as it was for the disciples on the Day of Pentecost, but it’s just as much of a fact.

But you still have to open yourself to its teaching, to its taking and expounding on Jesus’ word in Scripture.

Immerse yourself in it. Study it. Pray it.

And don’t worry. Immersing yourself in the Word will not make you less concerned about this world, less concerned about the conditions of humanity, but more concerned. And yet, through the teaching of the Holy Spirit, it will make Jesus words “Let not your hearts be troubled” more understandable, more accessible. Perhaps we can even follow that gracious entreaty.

Speaking of heart, the heart of what you’ve heard this morning in the Gospel reading and the sermon is contained in the beginning of our usual Sunday blessing. You know it well. But as we’ve been hearing a special Easter blessing the last few weeks and will again today, I’ll remind you of that usual beautiful blessing: It’s this: The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the love and knowledge of God, and of his Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen.

