

Queen Anne Christian Church
1316 3rd Avenue West
Seattle, Washington
Pastor Laurie Rudel

The Fifth Sunday of Easter - April 20, 2008

Text: John 14:1-14

Before I begin this morning I have to share this magnetic poetry haiku that I pieced together on our refrigerator on Friday morning:

*winter wind could freeze
small yellow spring blossom
summer like a dream*

Who knew that coming home on Friday evening from the multi-faith works concert that we would be greeted with snow!!!

In the introduction to his little book *Walking on Water* Anthony DeMello writes:

Prayer, love, spirituality and religion are about ridding yourself of illusions. When religion brings that about, that's wonderful, wonderful! When it deviates from that, it is an illness, a plague to be avoided. Once illusions have been abandoned, the heart is unobstructed, and love takes hold. That's when happiness occurs. That's when change takes place. And only then will you know who God is ...

It seems a fitting introduction to our text for this morning. Listen to these words from the fourteenth chapter of *The Gospel of John*:

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

In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going."

Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?"

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to God except through me. If you know me, you will know God also. From now on you do know God and have seen God."

Philip said to him, "Lord, show us God, and we will be satisfied."

Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen God. How can you say, 'Show us God'? Do you not believe that I am in God and God is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but God who dwells in me does God's works.

Believe me that I am in God and God is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves.

Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to God. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that God may be glorified in the Son. If in my

name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

This section in *The Gospel of John* continues on for three chapters and is known as the “Farewell Discourse”. Just before this in chapter 13 Jesus laid out the future for his disciples telling them of his betrayal, arrest, and coming death. Beginning with our text this morning He will teach them what they need to know about continuing on without him.

From our distant perspective the “Farewell Discourse” takes on the quality of one of those fishbowl experiments. It’s almost like one group, Jesus and the disciples, sit in the center of the circle and we, the observers, form the outer circle. How many of you have done one of those?

So as an observer the first thing we might notice is how Jesus works to calm their anxieties *Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.* In most translations the Greek word *pisteuo* is translated “believe.” In our time “believe” has become so flattened and contorted that in essence it has come to mean mental consent to a proposition **about** something.

We speak easily about “believing in the right to bear arms” for instance; or we “believe in gay rights” or “we don’t believe in abortion.” We can and do hold strong feelings about all kinds of issues. But this is not the kind of belief Jesus is talking about here. What Jesus is really talking about sounds more like this: *Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in me. . . . Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in me.*

Trust . . . as I ponder this I realize I like this word very much. Belief is hard for me, but trust . . . I remember times when someone lifted me up or when my heart offered a stable home to someone else. I remember how I have grown in trustworthiness over the years and how I have watched others grow. I know how my growing trust in God led me on a journey deep into the heart of myself.

Trust is a word that gets at my mind, my heart, my gut, my soul while belief plays around in my mind and does a kind of a “maybe, maybe not dance”. I know that for many of us trust is learned response. Perhaps our early family life verged on chaos. Perhaps we were abused by a trusted authority. Perhaps we even betrayed ourselves at crucial points in our life. But to engage in deep trust is to create an unshakable foundation . . . stable . . . solid . . . *Trust in God, trust also in me . .*

Within our fishbowl trust is hard to come by right now. For a moment put yourself inside of the disciples’ head. You have lived with, walked with, ate with Jesus for some now. You have participated with him in the miracle of healing and teaching. You have watched people dance with joy, praise God for newly recovered sight. For you, just being in Jesus’ presence brings a sense of calmness and order. Your mind stills, love flows: now he tells that he will be killed, that everything is about to change.

Thomas listens to Jesus, trying so hard to understand, not quite getting it, until finally he blurts out: *Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?* In other words . . . don’t go!!!!

On the other side of the fishbowl Philip speaks up: *Lord, show us God and we will be satisfied.* I get the impression that Philip might be one of those go-getter type people - maybe today he works in sales - who cuts directly to the chase. *Jesus, show us God and we will be set, good-to-go, and on our way with your message to the world. All we need is proof positive and then we can show others the God that fits so sweetly in the palm of our hands. Once you do that Jesus, then we can easily let go of you.*

Both Thomas and Philip hold up a mirror and show us the ways in which we do not trust: Thomas embodies all of our anxieties and fears about future change. He shows us what it looks like when we cling to a past that is about to change in dramatic and - to our mind - horrible ways. Philip,

reminds us of our blindness to the present moment: Jesus, sitting before him, is the embodiment of God.

A Japanese General was arrested by his enemies and thrown into prison. The man knew that the next day he was going to be tortured. He couldn't sleep; he kept pacing his cell, thinking about death. But suddenly he reached a conclusion: "When is it that I am going to be tortured? Tomorrow. But tomorrow is not real. That's what the Zen masters have taught me!"

As soon as he understood that he calmed down and went to sleep. By understanding that the only thing real is the now, he fell asleep. He was in prison, but he was a free man. The enemies of trust and freedom aren't outside; they're inside.

JESUS' RESPONSE

And Jesus' answer to Thomas and to Philip gets at the lack of trust lurking in the heart of every Disciple. It pinpoints our tendency to enshrine the past and thereby ignore the present moment; it shows us our blindness to what is with us in this moment.

To Thomas he says: *I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to God except through me.*

To Philip he says: *Have I been with you all this time and still you do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen God.*

Or we might paraphrase his responses as: Don't be distracted, don't be afraid—TRUST ME. Look at me and only me. And while to our ears in this time and place Jesus' words sound exclusive at heart it's not language intended to exclude others, but rather language intended to embrace those closest to him and to comfort. Come to me, and come to God through me. Remember? We have already been doing it. (NS)

Pastor Nanette Sawyer calls this love language. She writes:

Love language and identity formation (or maintenance) does not require us to disrespect or mistreat people in other love relationships with God or with identities which differ from our own.

She says: I've taken to calling myself a *pluralist* Christian, both claiming my identity as a follower of Jesus and further defining *how* I follow Jesus. Diana Eck has a great, basic definition of pluralism as:

- 1) an energetic engagement with diversity;
- 2) an active seeking of understanding across lines of difference;
- 3) an encounter of commitments;
- 4) pluralism is based on dialogue.

Late Monday night Maria Drury called and said that there was a good possibility she could offer me a ticket for the Tuesday morning Interfaith Seeds of Compassion session featuring the Dalai Lama, former South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and a host of other religious luminaries.

Now this was not the first time I had been offered a ticket. At least three times I had tried to get them only to be told I had not won lottery or I had not responded to an email quickly enough or that I could have a ticket but I needed to put in volunteer hours. Before I went away on vacation I put it out of my mind and mentally blessed the event from afar.

Early Tuesday morning it was confirmed, there were two extra tickets. Alina was also able to come and so we trekked our way to the Hec Ed Pavilion.

There we sat with thousands of others and listened to this distinguished panel — including a twelve year old — respond to questions from youth about compassion. What I saw and heard was the beauty of lives lived with deep religious passion that embraced the complexity of the world.

If Jesus were alive today he would have felt right home sitting with that panel between the Dalai Lama and the former Archbishop and the twelve year old Christian girl, the rabbi, the Buddhist nun, the Hindu nun, the convert to Islam, the Roman Catholic sister. Together they would have joked and poked at each other like school-children. Have you seen what God is up to?

It was Desmond Tutu who answered a question that neither Thomas nor Philip thought to ask when Jesus was with them: how can we possibly maintain a loving heart in the face of destruction?

Tutu said in his beautiful South African accent: We have an incredible capacity for evil AND we have an extraordinary capacity for goodness. We are the finite created for the infinite. I am a God-carrier . . . you are a God-carrier . . . you . . . and you . . . and you . . .

He could have just as easily said: *Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in me.*

Sources: Japanese General, *Walking on Water*, DeMello, p. 49; Nanette Sawyer is the founding pastor of [Wicker Park Grace](#), an innovative spiritual community on the west side of Chicago. She is the author of *Hospitality: The Sacred Art* (Skylight Paths). Her comments were made on TheoLog a blog found on the website of The Christian Century.