

“Words of comfort for anxious times”

John 14:1-14 (May 7, 2023)

I wake up in bed. It’s dark. Not time to get up yet! The clock says 3 a.m. I try to go back to sleep. But there are thoughts that keep asserting themselves, pushing their way in, flagging my attention. I don’t want to give in to them. What *are* these things that will not leave me alone?

There are worries that overwhelm us! And not just at night. Yet that’s when I’m most susceptible to them: when I’ve put my rational mind to rest, and other things find their way to the surface. Things that have to do with life: my family, my work, my world. Reviewing the past – maybe with regret. Imagining the future – all that could go wrong.



This is an *anxious* time we live in! So many people dealing with anxiety, depression, loneliness. The pandemic hasn’t helped. Neither has social media. Or a challenging economy. Or concerns about shifting climate or nuclear war. The world is changing rapidly. And that is stressful.



“Do not let your hearts be troubled,” says Jesus. Are your hearts troubled? Jesus was speaking, first of all, to those twelve friends that formed his inner circle. Their world was shifting.



The setting is the Last Supper. Jesus announces that one of his friends will betray him. “Who is it, Lord?” They look around, bewildered. Judas slips unnoticed into the night.

He tells the disciples they will look for him, but where he is going they cannot come. “What are you talking about? Where are you going, Lord?”

Peter, in a moment of bluster, promises that he will lay down his life for Jesus. “Will you? Before morning comes, you will deny me three times.”

It’s a moment of crisis. The disciples don’t understand what’s happening. If Jesus is leaving, what will become of them? Their world is spinning out of control.



But next thing you know, Jesus gives them these beautiful words of comfort. He speaks to reassure his beloved friends. “Do not let your hearts be troubled.” Don’t be anxious. Don’t worry. It will be OK.

Which is fine for him to say ... but if you are one of those disciples, it may not be so easy. Some of us are born worriers. We wring our hands over any little thing. It never seems little from our perspective. We have trouble imagining God’s bigger purpose to our lives.

Jesus tells us not to be troubled. So what is the remedy for that? “Believe in God,” he says, “Believe also in me.”

What does it mean to believe? Is it a matter of accepting some philosophical proposition that there is a God? When you’re thrust into a situation like the disciples are in, you simply have to take a leap of faith.

I want you to “believe,” says Jesus. Not just with your minds, but with something deeper. You’re going to have to trust. Trust is a willingness to stake our lives on the love of God. A willingness to live each day – not necessarily with proof, but with boldness. As though it really were true. Trust is belief in action.

The word used in the Greek text of our passage can be translated all these ways: to believe, to have faith, to have trust.

“Don’t be rattled.” Don’t be upset. “You trust God, don’t you? Trust me too!” Trust in God, trust in Jesus – these two go hand in hand.

Believe the words I speak, the things I do. Everything I say and do embodies the will and purpose of my heavenly Father. Reveals the presence of God in the world you live in. Trust me. It will be OK.



“In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. I’m going to prepare a place for you.” A place that’s has your name on it. Has had from the very beginning of time.

This is a pretty roomy place. Remember how the King James version puts it? “In my Father’s house are many mansions.” That never made a lot of sense to me. How can there be mansions inside a house? It would have to be a super-mansion.

But maybe that’s the point. The place Jesus goes to prepare is spacious. With more rooms than you can imagine. More rooms even than the majestic Palace of Versailles.



Think there won’t be room for you? Think you’ll be left out of the Kingdom of God? Don’t worry! I am leaving you for a little while. But I’m coming back. And when I do I’ll take you to that very place.



What place, you ask?

“I’ll take you to *myself*, so that where I am you may be also.” The thing the disciples want most – to be in the presence of Jesus – that is what he will give them!

We like to think of the heavenly city and streets paved with gold. And maybe that’s OK. Even the biblical writers had to imagine it some way. So they took what they knew and made it bigger and better than anything here on earth – a metaphor for God’s Kingdom in the great hereafter.

But the fundamental truth of it, and this is what speaks most powerfully to me, is that Jesus takes us to himself. All separation, distance, loneliness – is gone. We are promised an abiding place, with Jesus. And therefore also with his heavenly Father.

It is the fulfilment of all we long for: Love, relationship. We know some of these things already. But there will come a day, says Jesus, when we will know them completely. “I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.” Believe me. Trust me. It will be OK.



“And you know the way to the place where I am going,” he says.

“Wait, what?” cries Thomas. “We don’t know where you are going. How can we know the way?” He’s still in panic mode, you see.

When Jesus says he’s going away, Thomas thinks maybe to the next town over. So he asks for specific directions. “How are we going to find you, Jesus?”



He wants a road map. A GPS. But GPS won’t work for this. It might get you to some other place a few miles down the road. But Jesus isn’t talking about a literal road.

You want to know the way, Thomas? “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.” You want a map? You’re looking at it! I’m showing you. Everyday. All the time. You’re not lost. Just keep focussed on me. I am the way to God. The way to life. Real life, deep life, lasting life.

And I am the truth. More than all the misguided truth, and untruth, and partial truth that circulates in the world around us. I am God’s own truth, embodied in human flesh, and given to the world.



“If you know *me* you will know my Father also.”

This time it’s another disciple, Philip, who speaks up. “Lord, show us the Father and we will be satisfied.” If I could only see him.

“But you *can* see him,” says Jesus. And now I hear a twinge of frustration growing: “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me?”

What about you? How long have you known Jesus, been walking in his way? How long have you been listening to his words?

I have to confess, I have some sympathy for Philip. Like him, like all of us I guess, there are times in my life when faith is strong ... And other times when faith is weak, and it seems like I can barely hold on. I’m hanging by a thread. Just about ready to let go.

“Please show me Lord,” I cry! I want to believe. But it’s hard, and I don’t know if I can. “Show me the Father and I shall be satisfied.”



What a request! We don’t ask for much, do we?

Show me the Father? My goodness, show me the creator of all that is! Show the One who is ultimate mystery, the one whose image we must never worship, the one cannot be contained in any way. Yes, I know, but just a glimpse, Lord. That’s all I ask.

“Philip,” says Jesus. “I’ve already shown you.” “Look at *me*. I mean it, look at me! What do you see? “Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?”

The words I say, the works I do, all these reveal the Father who sent me. To see me is to see as much of God as any human can ever comprehend.



When I hear Philip's question, I am reminded of those puzzles that play with our eyes.

This is the first of a series of images developed by a Swiss psychologist named Hermann Rorschach. He showed a series of inkblots to his patients because he was curious about what their brains would make of them.



So what do you think? Is that a sinister looking bat or the shape of a beautiful butterfly, or something else? What your answer may say about you, I have no idea!

But Jesus is not ambiguous in his conversation with Philip. Look at me, Philip. What do you see? Put your fears aside, just have another look! "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father."



In a moment of crisis, when we are fearful, anxious and unsettled, Jesus speaks to reassure his disciples. Believe me. Trust me. It will be OK.



The disciples are not easily calmed. We never are. Yet Jesus is patient. He keeps bringing us back to the centre. Look at *me*. Don't let the chaos swirling around you and within, don't let it overwhelm. Whatever is happening just keep me at the centre of your life. I'm going to make a place for you. A wide and spacious place. There will be plenty of room.

Look at me! I am the way. Just keep on following. When times are easy, when times are tough. When we're close together, or when I seem very far away. Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. Trust me!

The English mystic, Julian of Norwich, said, "All shall be well, and all shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well." Amen.