

ST. MATTHEW'S CHURCH

NEW YORK CITY

CARE FOR THE HEART

John 14:1-14

Fifth Sunday of Easter, April 20, 2008

The disciples were now troubled men. After the euphoria of Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem had come His confusing words about imminent betrayal and denial by some of the Twelve. They were dismayed, and the trouble of their hearts was only a shadow of the darkness that lurked nearby.

In our Gospel lesson for today, Jesus, knowing their anguish, spoke to the issue in the opening words of John 14: **“Do not let your hearts be troubled.”** In the original Greek, this carries the firmness, resolve, and conviction of a command, though from the context we understand these words more likely to have been spoken very gently. Our Lord's statement was not just for His disciples, but for all who would ever follow Him. Rightly understood and applied, John 14:1-6 is good medicine for our hearts, for we too live in an age of anxiety.

A good title for our times would be “The Cardiac Age.” Many of us have troubled hearts today. Rising crime rates, rising costs of living, international crises, and political corruption, escalating violence not only in Third-World countries but in our own neighborhoods, all this and much more brings deep concern to our hearts.

When Jesus said, “Do not let your hearts be troubled,” He used a picturesque word. The idea is, “Don't let your heart shudder.” In the preceding chapter, in verse 21, the same word was used to describe Jesus' emotion as Judas went astray. It is a strong word, and He was saying specifically to the disciples (especially in light of the imminent cross), “It may look like your world is falling in and all is lost and the darkness is going to engulf you, but don't let your heart be troubled.”

Then He explained how to do this: **“Trust in God; trust also in Me.”** The way to have an untroubled heart is to believe in God and believe in Jesus. That is all there is to it. The tenses tell us, “Keep on believing in God. Keep on believing in Me.” If we would keep in mind the attributes of God, His

sovereignty, His omniscience, His omnipotence, our hearts would not be troubled like they often are. The Lord knew we would need a further explanation of what is involved, so He went on to specifically instruct us on the nature of the belief that will deliver our troubled hearts.

Believe Jesus is preparing an eternal place for you: *“In my Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.”* The word for “mansions” is found only here and in verse 23 and can be translated: resting places,” “abodes,” or “permanent dwelling places.” Clearly, Jesus knew that the disciples anticipated some such heavenly abode. He assures them that He would have corrected the notion if it were not true. The place where Christians will abide is a “prepared” place in heaven. While it is impossible to determine its location, the believer is promised the escort of Jesus Himself (This is possibly a reference to the rapture of the Church. (I Thessalonians 4:13-18), and then eternal fellowship with the Lord. “I will come again” is a futuristic present tense in the original Greek; “I am coming back.” The present tense is used to express the certainty of the future return. This is an explicit statement from Christ’s lips. He is coming again! His purpose will be to receive us.

An effective guard against having a troubled heart is to believe that Jesus Christ is preparing an eternal place for us as individuals. We all long for heaven. We have a longing for Heaven, whether we recognize it or not. We have a desire to live with Christ. We see this in our utopian political philosophies. Marxism, though it thrives on economic woe and injustice, at its core feeds on a longing for Heaven.

O happy day that fixed my choice
On Thee, my Savior and my God!
Well may this glowing heart rejoice,
And tell its raptures all abroad.

Now rest, my long divided heart;
Fixed on this blissful center, rest;
Nor ever from my Lord depart.
With Him of every good possessed.

Happy day, happy day,
When Jesus washed my sins away!

He taught me how to watch and pray,
And live rejoicing every day.
Happy day, happy day,
When Jesus washed my sins away!

Jesus tells us how our unsatisfied longing will be fulfilled: “In my Father’s house are many mansions [or dwelling places].” The idea is, he is preparing permanent dwelling places for us. When life falls in, when troubles assail us, as they indeed will, we can find comfort and rest for our troubled hearts in the fact that there is an eternal home prepared for us. The psychology of this is impeccable.

Having a deep, underlying heart realization that there is an eternal abode for us will bring rest to our souls in the midst of this troubled world. This, I believe, is what made the Apostle Paul such a powerful force even though his world kept falling in. I do not think anyone experienced more trials and tribulations than Paul, and perhaps no one has experienced more of God’s sustaining power. But he had an advantage over us. Listen to what he says; *“I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. And I know that this man, whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows, was caught up to Paradise. He heard inexpressible things, that a man is not permitted to tell.” (II Corinthians 12:2-4).*

Paul himself did not know if it was a vision or a literal physical experience, but somehow he was caught up into paradise, and there he saw heavenly realities. The same Apostle Paul who had this vision of Heaven and knew there was a real place for him went victoriously through an amazing list of difficulties (II Corinthians 11). The first certainly fueled the latter. **“But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Philippians 3:20).** And then he stated in Ephesians 2: 6; **“seated us with him [Christ] in the heavenly realms.”** It was that reality that made Paul such a warrior.

BELIEVE THAT JESUS IS COMING TO TAKE YOU TO BE WITH HIM: “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.” In our fallen world, we can gain relief for our troubled hearts from the fact that Jesus is going to take us to be personally with Him. Not just the place, but the person, Jesus,

is going to be ours. “I will come back,” “I am coming again,” is in the present tense. In the New Testament there are 318 allusions or direct references to the fact that the Lord is going to return to take us to be with Him personally. We are going to see Him face to face. In First John 3:2: *“Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”* This is to be a great comfort to our souls. Though we live in a world of trouble and tribulation, we **“wait for the blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.”** (Titus 2:13).

We all have repeated experiences of life falling in on us. Job said, “Yet man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward.” (Job 5:7). Trials are part of life on earth. But Christ always says to us in the darkness, “Do not let your hearts be troubled.” How? “Trust in God; trust also in me.” Specifically, this is a command to believe in the substance of verse 6: “I am the way and the truth and the life.” He invites us to remember that He is coming to take us to be with Him, and that will be healing medicine for our troubled hearts.