

Vicar's Reflection on the Fifth Sunday of Easter
May 10, 2020

"Do not let your hearts be troubled," Jesus says. Jesus knows that our hearts have a tendency to be troubled. If not, why would he go to such lengths to comfort them?

Like many children when my heart was troubled, I would run to my mother. She had a way of soothing my troubled heart. When my adolescent heart was troubled about how to talk to boys, I laugh today as I remember she said: "try talking to boys about themselves; they like that." When my teenage heart became troubled to the point of wallowing in self-pity, she said, "try doing something for someone else and not spend quite so much time worrying about yourself." And when more serious and grieving matters troubled my heart, she helped me get through them, and sometimes with words. Her help usually involved a hug, a patient listen, a dose of practical wisdom, and a prayer.

Troubled hearts have a way of getting stuck, without some help. Like on an old record player when the needle catches on a scratch in the vinyl, or a tape on replay, the trouble in our hearts has a hard time freeing itself from the troubling thing. And if it is not helped, if not set free, the trouble is the only sound our hearts (and minds) hear.

Troubled hearts are all around us, as we enter into the fourteenth chapter of John's gospel. Jesus has one, and so do the disciples, Thomas, Peter, and in particular, Philip. It was before the festival of the Passover, when Jesus washed his disciples' feet and taught them to do the same. Then John writes, "Jesus is troubled in spirit." What comes next is Jesus telling those same disciples that one of them, Judas, the who received the dipped bread, would betray Jesus. And, later to Peter, Jesus tells of the three denials at the time of Jesus' arrest.

The disciples' hearts are troubled. They have heard all that hard to bear news, And on top of it, Jesus says he is leaving soon, and they will not be able to follow or find him for now.

And, Philip's heart is deeply troubled. Philip is troubled because he doesn't see who Jesus is, even though they have been together all this time. Jesus isn't making sense in the way Philip understands things should make sense. Philip is that disciple, the one who questions the sufficiency of the food to feed the five thousand. Six months wages would not be enough to feed them a little, Philip protest, before five thousand are feed from a few fishes and loaves.

It isn't enough for Philip that Jesus says he is of and from God the Father. Philip wants to see the Father, for himself. Like traveling without a map (or GPS), proceeding without a guaranteed plan, what Jesus is describing is troubling, unnerving, for a disciple like Philip. I understand Philip. Philip seeks to be satisfied with proof, and instead Jesus is offering something greater and unimaginable to Philip.

Then like with a jolt, Jesus shakes Philip's troubled heart free, with a series of questions: "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me?"

Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? "

Jesus' tone is unclear, although John makes no suggestion that the questions come with anger or judgment. A jolt to a troubled heart does not have to come like a defibrillator sending an electric shock. Gentle truth, in most cases, is more effective. It keeps defenses down and hearts open for what is to come next.

Then come the words, the words that call out to the troubled hearts. "*Believe me,*" Jesus says. Believe me when I say I am in the Father and the Father is in me. And if you cannot believe from my words alone, believe me by the works that I have done while I have been walking with you.

Believe in me and you will find comfort, relief for your troubled heart, Jesus is saying. And in believing, you will find yourself asking, calling upon Jesus for help, praying in his name. I will hear you, and I will do what you ask, Jesus says.

Like a loving mother, holding a fearful child, in those words Jesus gives comfort, hope, and freedom to all sorts and conditions of troubled hearts. Then John shows us comfort upon comfort with Jesus' promise of the Advocate, the Helper, the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, and with the assurance that none will be left as orphans.

"Do not let your hearts be troubled," in these troubling time. Believe in the One God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and you will find comfort there.