

2022.5.22. Do Not Let Your Hearts Be Troubled (John 14:23-29) M. Newheart, SBC, Suffield, CT

This month I have been pursuing a sermon series from the Gospel of John, entitled, "Being One." May 1 Earth Sunday, we talked about being one with nature. May 8 Mother's Day we talked about being one with God. Last week, we talked about being one with one another. I told stories of three late individuals who for me exemplified Jesus' new commandment: "Love One Another." This week we will talk about **being one with God and with oneself**, especially when one has a troubled heart. I won't ask for a show of hands of people who have a troubled heart. It is a troubled heartfelt time, with violence and illness. Yet it was a grieving time for Jesus and his disciples because Jesus was getting ready to die and leave the disciples. This morning we look at the stories Jesus told his disciples, stories about himself, God the Creator, the Spirit, and the disciples.

The first story that Jesus tells is **his own story**. Jesus is going to die, but he is also going to rise again and ascend. But beyond that, he is going to return to God the Creator and give glory to God and to himself. Jesus said at the beginning of our reading last week, "Now the Son of Man (or the Human One) has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once" (John 13:31-32). That seems like a lot of double-talk and circuitous language, but in the context of the gospel he is saying that he has glorified God through his life and ministry, specifically these signs like changing the water into wine (2:1-11) and raising Lazarus from the dead (11:1-44). Now Jesus prepares to **give glory to God** through death, resurrection, and ascension. In the other gospels, the synoptic gospels, death is something humiliating that God reverses at the resurrection. But here in John, the death, resurrection, and ascension are one act of glorification of Jesus and God. Indeed, it is the way that Jesus returns to God. Jesus says to the disciples, "I am going to the Father" (14:28). He has come from God, and he is going to God.

But that is not the end of Jesus' story. He is going to return with the Father to **make a home with believers in the Spirit**. Jesus says in verse 23: "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them." The same Greek word is used earlier in the chapter when Jesus says in verse 2, "In my Father's house there are many dwelling places." The Greek word can be translated as home or dwelling places. The idea is that Jesus and God will dwell in the Spirit with the believer, not in the sweet by and by, but now, in this life. The Gospel of John doesn't say much at all about the afterlife. It does say a lot about eternal life, but it is eternal life that we have NOW through faith in Jesus. When Jesus speaks about "coming again," he is not referring to the second coming or to coming to get the believer at death, but rather he's talking about coming to the believer in the Spirit IN THIS LIFE! You have maybe heard preachers talk about Jesus going to heaven and prepare a place for us, and then when we die, Jesus comes to get us to take us to heaven. But that is not what Jesus is saying. Jesus and God dwell with us NOW in the Spirit. The emphasis in the Gospel of John is on this life: Eternal life is experienced now through faith in Jesus.

The "**Father's house**," which Jesus speaks about in the second verse of chapter 14, is Jesus' body. I know that that sounds weird, but that's what John says. In the second chapter of the Gospel, Jesus says after his action in the temple, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I

will raise it up." John says, "But he was speaking of the temple of his body." There are many dwelling places in Jesus' mystical body. We dwell in those places through faith. Sometimes Jesus speaks of believers being in him, and other times Jesus speaks of his being in the believer. It is sort of like air. Air is within us, but it is also around us. No wonder Jesus compares the Spirit to the wind (3:8). And when the Risen Jesus appears to the disciples on Easter Sunday night, he breathes on them and says, "Receive Holy Spirit" (20:22). You want to be in the Spirit; you want to dwell with God the Creator and Jesus. You already are. Just breathe. Just breathe.

The **disciples'** story begins in grief. Jesus has just told them that he is leaving them. The disciples are troubled; they are afraid. Judas has just gone to betray Jesus (13:21-30), and Peter would soon deny him (13:36-38). Thomas, Philip, and Judas (not Iscariot) ask Jesus questions because they don't understand what's going on. The disciples are a bunch of knuckleheads. They serve as negative examples for us. But also their questions give Jesus an opportunity to explain further what he means when he says that he is going away and will return to them.

Perhaps I have been too hard on the disciples. They are grieving. They have been with Jesus in the flesh for three years, but now it's over. But Jesus is telling them that it is not over. He will come back to them in the Spirit, the Advocate, the Comforter. And that Spirit is the spirit of peace. "**Peace** I leave with you; my peace I give you," Jesus says (14:27). When the Risen Jesus appears to the disciples on Easter Sunday night, he twice says, "Peace to you" (20:19, 21). Peace to you, Peter, who has denied me. Peace to you, Philip, who wanted me to show you the Creator. Peace to you, Judas non-Iscariot, who doesn't understand how Jesus is going to reveal himself to the disciples and not to the world (14:23). Peace to all.

Where do these stories of Christ, God, the Spirit, and the disciples find us? Well, the **stories continue**. God is still enacting the divine story in us, with us, and among us. We are grieving, because of covid, because of war and violence in many places in the world, because of shootings across this country. Oh Lord, how long? How long? But grief forces us into the arms of a loving God. Grief opens us up to this peace-giving God, this homemaking-with-us God. Got troubled heart? Grieving? A former student of mine, a national leader among Presbyterians, posted on Facebook this meme: "(Quote) You're always fine, you always are.' (Unquote) Yes, I will be. But please allow me a moment to express and display my sadness & discomfort. I know it will get better, but I need to also be honest and say my spirit is temporarily heavy and not have to hide that."

Sometimes we come into church with our **mask** on, not the covid mask but the mask that says that "we're fine, just fine" when really, we are not. Can we open ourselves to one another and to God and thus experience healing and peace from that God who makes the divine dwelling with us? Can we breathe? Can we exhale?

Thirty years ago, Terry McMillan wrote a book entitled *Waiting to Exhale*. It was made into a movie with Whitney Houston and Angela Bassett. It was about four successful single black women who held their breath because they were waiting for a romantic relationship in which they could relax and exhale. In many ways, during covid, we have been **waiting to exhale**. We have held our breath with fear, with anxiety that we might get covid, that our loved ones would get covid and that we might die. Last week the Sunday *New York Times* featured a

front-page headline that screamed, ONE MILLION. A NATION'S IMMEASURABLE GRIEF." Under that headline was a large map of the United States in which each dot represented one person who has died of Covid-19 in the U.S. A dark stripe went from Washington, DC to New York through Connecticut and up to Boston. We are grieving. Our hearts are troubled.

But Jesus offers **peace**. This peace comes through the Spirit that God gives, the Spirit that enables God and Jesus to make their homes in us, the Spirit that enables us to have our dwelling places with God, the Spirit, wind, breath. God is in our midst. You may not feel like it, but God is. We are **one with God**. But how can we experience that oneness? Breathe mindfully. The Risen Jesus comes to us as he did of old. He breathes on us and says, "Receive Holy Spirit." So with every breath, we are one with God. We inhale God's spirit from God, and you exhale God's spirit into God. We are in God, God is in us. We are one with God. Nothing can change that. What changes is our awareness. Remember? Awareness of our oneness is our witness.

Sometimes, though, we forget that we are one with God, and we get lost in our anxiety. How do we refocus? How do we re-center? We focus on our **breath**, as we breathe in God's spirit, and we breathe out into God's Spirit, which is both within and all around us. Through the Spirit, God makes a divine dwelling within us. We make a divine dwelling with God. All we must do to remember is to breathe. We are one with everything that breathes. God breathes with us. We breathe with God.

Some years ago Ann Tyler published a book called *Breathing Lessons* about a single day in the marriage of Maggie and Ira Moran as they head up from Baltimore, Maryland to Deer Lick, Pennsylvania for a funeral. As we ride up with the Morans, we learn all about their marriage: its pitfalls, its triumphs, and ultimately its resilience. One reviewer wrote, (the author Ann) "Tyler . . . seems to say that an enduring marriage can become as natural as breathing." (<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/jul/20/100-best-novels-breathing-lessons-by-anne-tyler-maggie-moran-ira>). In the same way, the life of the Christian disciple can be as natural as **breathing**, as we mindfully breathe in the spirit and breathe out into the spirit.

Jesus goes to God through death, resurrection, and ascension, and comes to dwell with us through the Spirit. We are **one with God**, we are one with all that is. God is as close as our breath.

I would like to conclude with this short **prayer-poem**:

Un-trouble our hearts, peace-giving God,
Home in on us, home with us, home where our heart is.
Breathing, we remember our oneness with you.
Inspire us, conspire with us
to know, to love, to be.
We are one with you.

And all God's people said, "Amen."