

Easter 5A

May 10, 2020

Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Luke's

Acts 7:55-60 The stoning of Stephen.

1 Peter 2:2-10 Grow into salvation: we are living stones, a chosen race, a royal priesthood.

John 14:1-14 I am the way, truth, life.

Let's take a moment to think about how bad a day the disciples were having as we join them in this Gospel lesson. They had traveled with Jesus for three years. They had listened for thousands of hours as he taught how marvelous and wonderful God's kingdom is; and how absolutely and completely God loves us; and how extremely important it is to God that we work on our relationship with God, and not just blindly follow rules. The disciples saw Jesus come into Jerusalem in the style of a visiting king; with fanfare, and waved palms, and shouts of Hosannah. But as they share their last dinner together, the evening takes a very different turn. Can the disciples really be hearing what they think they are hearing?

Jesus – I will be with you only a little longer.

Peter asked – Lord where are you going?

Jesus – Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later.

Peter – I will lay down my life for you.

Jesus – Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.

Jesus – Do not let your hearts be troubled.

One thing was very clear - some big changes were about to happen.

In Acts, we read about Stephen being attacked and stoned to death for sharing his inspired vision of Jesus at the right hand of God. The life of these friends and followers of Jesus surely was NOT protected and made easy because of their faith.

John of the Cross wrote about times like this. He was the founder of the Discalced Carmelites in the late 1500s. He was a priest, theologian, and poet. He wrote about the 'dark night of the soul' that he experienced, and many people experience. He wrote that the dark night is part of the path to a deeper experience of God. I think that concept is worth exploring in our days of Covid-time.

Is your heart troubled today? Is life feeling overwhelming? Do the hopes you have for your life seem out of reach with social distancing, closed businesses, layoffs, and wondering if other people are smiling or frowning under their face masks? Are health worries, or finances, or stress pulling you into a dark place, and you don't know how to climb back to the light?

Jesus knew about these dark places; and he offered help to his friends to make their way out of the darkness. Let's look at the light he brings... Jesus said: "Do not let

your hearts be troubled”. But he didn’t stop there. He went on... to arm his friends – and us - with something we really can use. He said; “Trust in God, trust also in me”. He was telling us to trust in three things; Trust in his presence, trust in his promises, and trust in his person.

1. Trust in his presence. When Jesus said, “Trust in God, trust also in me,” that could be read two ways; “You trust in God, now it is time to also trust in me”. Or, “I know you already trust in God and in me. Now remember, when you can’t see me any more, don’t stop trusting in me.”

Jesus knew that it is easiest for us to trust the things we can see and touch. Jesus showed the wounds of his crucifixion to Thomas so that Thomas could believe it was Jesus. Jesus said, “Thomas because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

Later Jesus said, “I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Jesus promised to be with us every minute, for everything we go through – the good and the bad. He does not leave us to fend for ourselves. He walks with us through our journey. He wants us to trust in his presence here and now.

2. Trust in his promises. And here is the promise, “In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go and 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.” Jesus promises to come back for you and for me, to lead us by his hand; to accompany us; guide us; re-assure and comfort us. Jesus has promised to guide us to our real home.

The word Jesus used for ‘dwelling place’, or room, comes from the eastern custom that when a son grows up and marries, he brings his bride back home again. The father adds another room onto his house for them. Then when another son grows up and marries, they add on another room to the house. The house just keeps getting bigger and bigger, as the family stays together. “In my Father’s house there are many rooms.” He asks us to trust in his promise to keep us close to him.

3. Trust in his person. Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” Jesus is not just explaining a way to live in family relationship with God; he IS that family relationship. He taught us about God’s deepest desire for agape love to be at the heart of our relationship with God, and with each other. God’s passion for us to be in that relationship was at the center of sending his Son to us. By holding belief in Jesus, we ARE God’s kids. Jesus is the way into that level of relationship with God that is unique to Christianity. Jesus is the way.

Jesus said he is truth. He not only spent his life teaching us what the truth is, but Jesus IS truth too. God's one and only Son died for us, and was raised to new life. Jesus promises that the truth of his life and resurrection is our truth too. Your destiny and mine is to be at home in God's living room; in God's house. Jesus is truth.

And finally, Jesus said that he is LIFE. He didn't say he was just barely surviving. Jesus said "I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly." Jesus brings us more than existence, more than getting by. Jesus brings us fulfilled, useful, purposeful, abundant life. Living THAT LIFE means being all that God has created us to become. Jesus taught, modeled, and WAS that life. By knowing him, we know the life we are meant for. Jesus is life.

Jesus teaches us that we need to believe in God and believe in him. He invites us to lean on him, and use our faith communities to plant, and water, and tend: Trusting in his Presence; Trusting in his Promises; and Trusting in his Person – that he is the way, the truth and the life.

The choice to trust empowered Stephen, and Peter, and all of the disciples to become much more than they ever thought they would be. **That choice to trust** can empower us to be a force for divine blessing into a world that desperately needs it.

Amen.