

Let Not Your Hearts Be Troubled

A sermon by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on the 5th Sunday of Easter, May 2, 1993. Scripture Lessons: Acts 7:55-60; Psalm 31:1-5; 15-16; 1 Peter 2:2-10; John 14:1-14.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

I. "Let not your hearts be troubled", Jesus said. When I was a boy, one of the things that troubled my heart the most was my Spring piano recital. Between the first and eighth grades, I took piano lessons at the Delaware School of Music on Broom Street in Wilmington from Mrs. Mapp, a Belgian woman who was a perfectionist. Each year the school held its recital in the DuBarry Room of the Hotel DuPont. It seemed like hundreds of people attended.

I knew in the Fall about the recital but it was so far in the future that I rarely thought about it. But in the Spring, Mrs. Mapp picked a recital piece for me. That's when my heart really began to be troubled. From that time on the thought of my recital haunted my dreams. I had to memorize the piece. That meant hours of tedious practice. As the day of judgement drew nearer, my heart became more and more troubled. I couldn't sleep at night. I had nightmares. I once dreamed that I played the first movement of Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata* bear naked before hundreds of onlookers.

I guess that's pretty much how I approach the certainty of my own death. Early in my life I gave it little thought, it seemed so far away. But as I grow older, and that event draws, inevitably, nearer, my heart is sometimes troubled by the thought of death. I'm becoming more and more aware that I have a recital to prepare for.

Why does the thought of death sometimes trouble my heart? It troubles me

because I fear sometimes that I'll lose so much by dying. I fear I'll lose the people I love, my wife, my children, my friends, my work; all the things which give me so much joy. Again, my heart is sometimes troubled at the thought of death because I fear that "somewhere beyond the dark night of dying there's a divine light that may expose me for what I really am; and I sometimes fear that Someone may see that I'm not as good as I pretend to be or as others think I am (Smedes)" Then, again, the thought of death sometimes troubles my heart because it's a dark door into a darker unknown. Even though I believe that Jesus has gone to prepare a place for me and will come again to receive me to himself, my heart is still troubled at the thought of experiencing something entirely new and unknown.

His words addressed

"Do not let your hearts be troubled," Jesus commanded his disciples.² They ~~had disciples and were needs. The fear of loss. The fear of the unknown - I go to prepare a place.~~ ~~The fear of exposure "Let not your hearts be troubled"~~ certainly had lots to be troubled about. Jesus had just announced that he was

going to be leaving them. The disciples knew that he was speaking of his death.

- 1. Loss - many rooms
- 2. Fear of exposure - not what you want to be troubled
- 3. Unknown - I go to prepare...

They were troubled with the thought of losing him. They were also troubled by the fact ~~Jesus had said Peter would deny and all forsake.~~ ~~thoughts of their own deaths.~~ ~~of Jesus addressed their needs and ours.~~ *They were troubled by the dark unknown. The words*

2. "Let not your hearts be troubled", Jesus said to them, and to to us. "Believe in God. Believe also in me." Faith in God, faith in Christ, is the antidote to our troubling thoughts in the face of death. If my faith were stronger, I would not sometimes be troubled at the thought of death. Nevertheless, one of my core beliefs is the conviction that the followers of Jesus share in his victory over death, share in some significant way in his resurrection. In Jesus God reached out to share his love in a personal way with lost human beings, broken by life and

troubled in heart. He offered his love in order to rescue us from our lostness. So great was that love that Jesus- whose nature I believe is the same as that of God ~~was~~- died and rose again to rescue us from the control that death and evil have over us. This is one of my core beliefs.

Let me tell you some reasons why I believe this.

I believe because I was brought up in a believing family. My mom and dad did a lot of believing. They had to because back in the thirties, before I was born, faith in God, faith in Christ, was about all they had. My mom and dad were far from perfect and they made plenty of mistakes which I constantly reminded my mother of when I became an adult. But I believe in Christ because of them. I don't know what I would believe if I had been raised in Outer Mongolia or Russia.

We're all familiar with the Sunday School song:

Jesus loves me,
This I know, for the Bible tells me so.

I can just as well sing:

Jesus loves me,
This I know, for my mother told me so.

I'm not alone in this. A reporter once asked the great theologian Karl Barth: "Sir, you have written many huge volumes about God; tell me, how do you know it's all true?" The learned Theologian answered with his eyes laughing, "My mother told me."

Moms and dads are God's primary way of introducing their children to Christ. One of our primary responsibilities as parents is to lead our children to Christ. We can't believe for them. But we can point them to Christ from their earliest age.

Some people come to believe in Christ in spite of their parents. Maybe you had abusive parents or perfectionist parents. Sometimes our moms and dads can be an obstacle in coming into the Father's house. I never could identify with the testimony of Christians who spoke of growing up with abusive parents; of not knowing about Christ and of how they came to turn from such things as drugs and crime and immorality to Christ. I never could identify with those testimonies. I am grateful for them, however, because they tell us that the grace of God can bring us to faith in Christ despite our parents. But I'm grateful that my mom and dad pointed me to Christ at a young age and I hope and pray that my own children will be able to say, thirty years from now, I believe in Christ because of my mom and dad.

I also believe in Christ because the church put its caring arms around me at an early age. The church I grew up in was far from perfect. Sometimes the members were not loving and kind and, as a child, I rarely felt the church was relevant to my needs. Nevertheless, the church nurtured my faith in the God we know in Christ. Sometimes people get a shocking peek at the seamy, sin-infected side of the fallible church, and become cynics instead of believers. But despite the sins and faults of the church my faith was nurtured in the church.

I believe in Christ, not only because of my parents and church, but also because of the Bible. Neither my mom, dad or church would have told me about God's grace that comes to us through Jesus were it not for the Bible. In Scripture, I hear the voice of the One who reveals himself in Jesus to be the Lord. This book points us

to a God who can be known only through Christ. It teaches us about the grace of God which comes to us only through Christ. Christian faith feeds on this book. People who stop listening to the Word of God in Scripture don't usually become agnostics or atheists. They simply come to believe less and less in the unique revelation that God has given us in Jesus Christ. They turn to nature. They turn to their own personal religious intuitions. They seek God in ways that by-pass Christ. Only people who keep listening to this Word keep faith alive. The church that turns away from this book is bound to lose its faith in the One who said, "I am the way and the truth and the life."

3. "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God. Believe also in me", Jesus said. He went on to say, "In my Father's house are many dwelling places." Jesus intimates that heaven is like a home with many rooms, enough rooms for everyone. Doubtless, if we use our imagination, we can see a living room and dining room where all God's children gather. But if you look at a commentary you'll discover that the word *dwelling places* can be translated *resting places*. And that reminds of the rooms in our own homes which we call resting places, our bedrooms.

It used to be that rarely a night would go by in our home without one of my boys saying to me, "Dad, come to my room. Will you rest with me?" Those times, unfortunately, are becoming increasingly rare as my boys grow older. But I treasure those times when I was at home in the evening and could rest with them. As the shadows lengthened and the evening came, and the busy world became hushed and the fever of the day was over, and their work was done, I would

inevitably hear one of my boys say, "Dad, come to my room. Will you rest with me?" And I'd come and lie beside him on the bed. Sometimes we'd talk about baseball or Kit Carson or about creation and evolution or something that happened in school that day. And then the talking would die down and there would be peace and quiet. There are no more words. They had no fears of darkness. No fears of monsters because where I was, there they were also.

The memory of those quiet moments resting together are priceless to me. They remind me of what Jesus said to his disciples. "In my father's house are many resting places. I go to 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." When I hear Jesus say that my heart does not feel so troubled with the thought of death.

There are many rooms in heaven, many resting places. Room for all of us. The Risen Christ has gone to prepare a resting place for us in our Father's house. And when the shadows lengthen and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over, and my work is done, then, in God's tender mercies, he grants us a safe lodging, and a holy rest, and peace at the last; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Let us pray: Almighty God, your Son Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. Give us grace to trust in him, and through him come to know and trust you. This we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.