

“Do Not Let Your Hearts Be Troubled”

Do you ever hear your parents or grandparents words come out of your mouth? My maternal grandmother spent a great deal of time with us as she helped my mother—her daughter—run a house with six children. We’d ask her when something was going to happen and she’d reply, “By and by, dear, by and by.” We heard it as “bon by,” but we figured out that it meant “later.” The one we heard from my father often was “we’ll cross that bridge when we get to it.” We weren’t exactly sure what he meant until we were older but we figured out that we weren’t getting an answer from him. My poor mother, though, I have realized, was simply exasperated as she had a heavy sigh or after “Ma, Ma, Ma, Ma..” “WHAT!”

Now, in school, there were others but the one that often irked me was when the teacher would ask, after saying we’d work silently, would ask “who’s talking?” It bothered me because NO ONE was going to answer. “Oh Sister, I was talking. Punish me!” I told myself I’d never say that in a classroom during my teaching years but, lo and behold, I learned it was a great device to simply get the room to be quiet without

having to do anything else. I have heard all of those expressions come out of my mouth—the “WHAT” when I heard, “Mr. Nesbit, Mr. Nesbit, Mr. Nesbit...” I always apologized after that and told them, “I am sorry, that was the voice of my mother on a bad day.”

What are some of the sayings you remember from your home or school? Take a moment to think about it. Now, according to your comfort level, turn and share your answer with someone near you. Or, you can get up and move about the room. You have two minutes. Is there anyone who'd like to share?

I asked us to think about some of these because Jesus also had sayings that remain with us. “I am the vine, you are the branches.” “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Today's gospel reading gives us “Do not let your hearts be troubled.” This gospel passage is often used at funerals or times of trouble so to remind us that the deceased now rests comfortably with God for eternity. While the words can bring some comfort, they may only work for a little while during the grieving process. How can we use the words, “Do not let your hearts be troubled” in our everyday lives?

Some of us see our children or grandchildren waste their talents as they wander from the way of living we had dreamed for them. Our hopes and dreams are shattered as we see them wasted like the prodigal. Our hearts may be troubled by difficulty at work. Our hearts may be troubled by our lack of faith or our failure to develop our faith in God. Death of a friend or family member or self may cause our hearts to be deeply troubled. Whatever the reason for our troubled hearts, it is so similar to that experience of the disciples—even of Jesus himself.

This passage takes place as part of something that theologians and Scripture scholars call the Last Supper Discourses. At least three chapters in John's Gospel are devoted to this and have the many sayings of Jesus. Imagine, if you will, Jesus' disciples who were with him and listening to this. They had their faith in this Messiah and here he is telling them that they should not be sad that he is going away and that he is preparing a place for them. Instead, they get, "Do not let your hearts be troubled." We know from hearing and reading the stories that they finally understand what he is telling them and how their faith should be formed.

Likewise, there are people in this congregation (both in Westfield and Southwick) who have experienced heartbreak and pain, either physical, emotional, or spiritual—sometimes all three, and have somehow managed to continue with their lives. Not everyone is as fortunate. Actually, no one escapes losing someone or experiencing loss of one kind or another. We'd like to think that because we've led a good life and followed all the rules that we'd be spared. It is not the case.

What is this case, though, is that we have our faith, the love of God, and the support of a worshiping community to support us. Even if we're angry with God and can't deal with going to church for awhile, God is always there with arms wide open, ready for our return. We have the promise of the resurrection and life everlasting in the company of our loving God. It is ok to express your grief, anger and any other emotion to God. To me, that takes the form of a prayer. "Help me through this, God."

Do not let your hearts be troubled. What can we do to remedy this? I am reminded of the hymn "Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus."

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus
Look full in his wonderful face
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of his glory and grace*

This is sometimes easier said than done, but what do we have to lose? It may take some time but, when you're in trouble, give it some time.

We're here to help you as well. Do not let your hearts be troubled.