

Wesley United Methodist Church
Easter 5
May 10, 2020
When Our Hearts are Troubled
Scripture: 1 Peter 2:2-10
John 14:1-14

During the past two weeks, I pretended to take a little break from COVID-19 concerns so that I could pack all my belongings and move from the parsonage to a condominium that I made an offer on before the pandemic. It's been a very busy couple of weeks since I never anticipated that I would be packing and moving in the middle of stay-at-home orders.

One of the things about moving is that it always invites me to focus on questions about what is important to me, what memories or parts of my life do I want to hold onto and what am I ready to let go off. This time my decision making had to be much more intentional than at other times because I was also downsizing by about 50%.

Two things that I didn't even have to think about were my grandmother's china closet and my mother's desk. Both of those are deeply rooted in who I am and memories of people very important in my life. Pictures of my father's grandparents also connected strongly with me, especially since my deceased brother looks just like my great-grandfather. These are just some of the pieces that are foundations of my life; things that connect me to my roots.

Today is the day we celebrate as Mother's Day or the Festival of the Christian Home. It is a day when we think about where we came from and about the people who had a big part in forming us into the people we are today. Although we are not able to celebrate or gather in the ways we

might normally do, many of us will still find ourselves thinking about the people who have been important in our lives.

One of the foundations of my life has been the church. When I was a child, my father was the lay leader and my mother was the financial secretary. As an infant, I slept in my carriage in the pastor's back yard right under the window where my mother would be counting the Sunday offering. It seemed like we were in the church just about anytime the doors were open; so the church really is one of the cornerstones of my life.

Our scripture from 1 Peter this morning reminds us about the true cornerstone for our life – Jesus. Writing to people who were likely suffering some persecution for their faith, the author of this letter tells his readers that with Christ as our cornerstone, our lives are built into spiritual houses that are strong fortresses in the middle of the chaos that so often is life.

He reminds us that just as infants instinctively seek nourishment, as we grow, we continue to have the instinct and orientation to crave, need and to move toward our source of sustenance for life. We instinctively reach out looking for kindness, caring, looking for love.

For those of us who have been parents, we may also remember that even as an infant reaches out to his or her parents, as parents we are oriented to caring for a helpless child. We eagerly feed a baby or talk to a baby or rock a baby trying to soothe and meet the infant's needs.

Our scriptures today, tell us that our loving God is even more eager and desperate to feed us, to reach out to us when we are in need. That's what Jesus was doing in the Gospel reading this morning. He was trying to prepare his disciples for life without him walking beside them. He told them that he would not leave them alone, and that he would come to them again.

Our relationship with God is not one-way with us trying to get to God, but rather God is also always coming to us, reaching out to us, trying to comfort us. God is the best example of a loving parent that we can imagine. Even the most loving human parent is but a glimmer of what God as a loving parent is truly like.

In a time of great uncertainty for the disciples, Jesus reminds them that their future – and ours – is in the hands of love. Just as even the best, most loving, earthly parents cannot always protect their children, and just as we could not always protect our own children, God is not always able to protect us from the consequences of our own decisions, or the decisions of others, or the dangers of floods, earthquakes, fires, or even a pandemic.

However, just as the most loving earthly parents will stand by and support their children, so God always stands by us. God shows us steadfast love. This is why Jesus can say to his disciples, “Don’t let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith in me as well.” He wasn’t telling his disciples to ignore their fear. He was recognizing it and acknowledging it. He came to them right where they were, right in the middle of all their feelings.

What he was telling them, I believe, is that they, and we, can let go of our need to control the future. We can let go of our anxiety about what is going to happen. If we think about it, most of our greatest fears are lived out only in our imaginations. We worry about many things that may never happen and then we are surprised by the things that do happen – things we didn’t anticipate.

I mentioned my grandmother’s china closet as being something that was, and is, very special to me. For years, I anticipated the day that my boys would become too rambunctious and unintentionally one of them

would break the curved glass on the cabinet. The china closet survived grandchildren like me at my grandmother's house. It survived my children and had been surviving my grandchildren. It survived three moves with me. However, one night about three weeks ago, a picture fell off the wall, and flew at such an angle that it caught the glass on one side and broke it.

The things we worry about most, often don't happen. That doesn't mean that we shouldn't prepare for them and take proper precautions. We are worshipping at home because we are taking precautions against an invisible virus that has already killed more people in this country than died during the Vietnam War. A friend of mine and her husband just passed the quarantine stage after he was exposed at work, but now she has just been diagnosed with a disease that typically has a 2-5-year life expectancy.

We can spend a lot of time worrying about things, and having the worry take a toll on us physically, psychologically and emotionally – and it can be really hard not to worry about dangers that are very real. The alternative is that we can give them to God who walks with us and stands with us no matter what is happening. That can be hard to do, and it has been suggested that we might write down those things that we worry about and place them in a “God box” and make a ceremony or ritual of giving them to God.

That's a good idea, and I might encourage you to try it. However, if you are anything like me, I tend to periodically snatch the box back from God. I think another way is to pay attention to the many ways that God has already been present throughout our lives. Pay attention and name the times when God reached out to you during a difficult time. Sometimes that looked like a phone call from a friend. Sometimes it might have taken the form of someone doing something special for us at just the right time.

Sometimes, it may have been a feeling of peace that came over you just when you needed it the most. God has been and continues to reach out to us during our lives. God continues to be the source of hope when hope seems dim. God is our sustainer when we feel like we can't put one foot in front of the other.

When our hearts are troubled, God is the one who provides comfort and soothes our spirits. God is the cornerstone, the foundation of our lives, the one who gives our lives meaning.

We are reminded of the words that Deborah sang earlier, "Our cornerstone is Christ alone, and strong in Christ we stand. O let us live transparently and walk heart to heart and hand in hand."ⁱ While we take comfort in Christ as our cornerstone, we also are then called to share that with others. We are called to build upon that cornerstone and to be stones used for constructions that are "vibrant with life"ⁱⁱ. We are chosen to be God's instruments to do God's work wherever we find ourselves. We are to tell others of the difference God has made in our lives. We are to then live our lives in a way that makes a difference in the lives of others. We are to be the friend on the other end of the telephone, the person who brings food to the food pantry, the one who writes a note to a health care worker or a grocery store clerk and thanks them for what they are doing.

This week I invited the children in our church to draw or take a picture showing thanks for those who are working on the front line in this pandemic. They may or may not have realized that this is one of the ways of letting others know that they are not alone, and that God is with them through the presence of others.

All of us are called to help be the hands and feet of Christ in our world today as we witness to the ways that God has been and continues to be

present in our lives; comforting us, strengthening us, nourishing us, loving us and walking with us each and every day.

Let us pray:

Our loving God, it can be hard for us to trust in your sustaining love especially during a pandemic. Fear, anxiety, and doubt may keep us in a loop of worry, tension, and even despair. Help us to see all the ways that you have already loved us, carried us, and been there for us. Help us to notice how your grace and love are present even now. Help us to let you love us through our fears and help us to reach out to love others in their fear. Help us to be your hands and feet sharing your love with a world in need. Amen.

ⁱ Leech, Bryan Jeffery, "We Are God's People", Faith We Sing # 2220

ⁱⁱ McFee, Marcia. Worship Design Studio, "Heart of the Matter", notes for Easter 5.