

Easter 5, Year A

Acts 7:55-60, 1 Peter 2:2-10, John 14:1-14

“Let not your hearts be troubled.” How could they not be troubled in the midst of world turmoil and the current state of the UK? Even if it hardly touches us personally, we are troubled for the dying, the destitute, the fearful and the grieving peoples elsewhere.

But trouble is a normal part of life; being troubled is normal. We should not feel guilty because we are feeling troubled. It can lead to action.

Jesus was troubled. We read that when Jesus saw Mary weeping after the death of her brother Lazarus *he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.* (John 11:33) When he was thinking of his own imminent death by crucifixion he said *“Now is my soul troubled.”* (John 12:27) and of the time when Jesus was anticipating the approaching betrayal by Judas, John writes that he was *troubled in spirit.* (John 13:21) Being troubled is a normal part of human existence. And the Son of God was not exempt from it.

Although even while he is troubled his focus is on relieving the minds of his followers! Being troubled is normal. It’s what we do with it that counts.

“Do not let your hearts be troubled.” *Do not let...* we have a choice. To let, or not to let. These words of Jesus, said in a different time and in a different context, can be applied to our situation.

Jesus says that solution to being troubled is belief in himself. This is more than belief about him - the word means trust in, place confidence in.

The disciples were troubled because life as they knew it, life in the close physical presence of Jesus, was coming to an end. He was going away; they wouldn’t see him again. How would they manage? What would they do with the earth-shattering realisation that Jesus was alive when he was to be gone from them? Why was he going? Where was he going?

It is the answers to these questions that are the pointers as to how not to be troubled, but where instead to place our confidence.

Because Jesus is not leaving with a “Well, my job is done now. I’m away back to my Father and you folks are on your own.” Not a bit of it. Jesus is going to prepare a place for his disciples where his Father is, so that they can all be together.

In my Father’s house are many rooms. Commentators tell us that we rightly interpret *my Father’s house* to mean heaven. *In my Father’s house* – in heaven - *are many rooms.* Or, as the King James Version I grew up with puts it, *In my Father’s house are many mansions.* But this is a mistranslation. “Mansions” is a transliteration from the Latin Vulgate use of “mansio” meaning a dwelling place or home. But there is nothing in the Greek to suggest that we will be segregated into separate compartments, neither mansions nor rooms.

We often hear this read at funerals. And it is very reassuring to know that our loved ones have not gone but have just, in the words of Billy Graham, changed address.

But if we take Jesus’s words as applying only to a change of address after we die, I think we miss the full import of what Jesus is saying.

We miss the reassurance Jesus is giving to his disciples. I don’t think he’s saying, “Just grit your teeth, chaps, it will all be OK once you die.”

Jesus is looking towards something much more glorious, much more immediate.

As I said, there is nothing in the original Greek to indicate separate dwelling places. The word simply means “abidings”. *In my Father’s house are many abidings.* Of course, ‘abidings’ isn’t an English word so it gets changed to dwelling places, which is understandable. But I think we lose something in the translation.

Because abiding is something that Jesus bangs on about quite a lot, particularly in the next chapter, abiding in him. It is something metaphysical, something spiritual. And without actually using the word to abide, Jesus speaks of it when responding to Philip: “*Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.* ¹⁰ *Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me.*” Father and Son are inter-abiding.

And for us abiding is something that starts now, by trusting in Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life. Trust that Jesus is the Truth of God.

Trust that Jesus is the Life of God. Trust in the truth and the life; that is the way to abide.

The same Greek word 'abiding' is used in John 14:23 where it is translated as "home": *"Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love him or her, and we will come to him and make our home with her."* We will abide together with them, even now in our physical bodies on earth, and later in our new bodies in heaven.

But abiding in the kingdom of heaven starts now. Paul puts it this way in Colossians 3 (v.1-3) *Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.*

There's a lot in there! Paul says that we are with Christ in God. We abide. And as such, we are already seated in Christ in heaven where he is sat! Our abiding in heaven has already begun. We are already inhabiting our spiritual abiding-place. So let not our hearts be troubled.

Focus instead on abiding in Christ, seeing the world from his perspective, seated at the right hand of the Sovereign Father Almighty, trusting that it is all in his hands and all will be well.

Because we have work to do. I cannot tell you what Jesus means by *"greater works"* in verse 12 but I do see that we are to do the works that Jesus did. And that's challenging enough!

But we are able to do them, Jesus says, *because I go to My Father*. There is power in the culmination of Jesus's mission with his return to his Father. There is power in the consequent gift of Holy Spirit to his followers, to us. And I for one should like to see this manifest in genuine healing at tonight's Service of Prayers for Healing. We wish! We pray!

There is one thing that Jesus did which we can do. He prepared a place for others. He was a place-maker.

And we have that privilege too. By our lives, our actions, our words and by our prayers, we are to be place-makers, introducing those around us into the way to an abiding place with Christ.

Peter writes (1 Peter 2:9) *you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*

A royal priesthood. This is what priests do: stand in the gap between people and God to bring about reconciliation.

I hope that this evening we can be place-makers for those who join us. Pray that it may be so.

Because the last two verses of our gospel reading should challenge us to do just that – and hopefully raise our faith!

Whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.

Wow! Amen, Lord Jesus, amen .

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