

Let not your Hearts be Troubled

John 14: 1-14\*

May 7, 2023

Easter 5A

The Rt. Rev. Dr. Bonnie A. Perry

*I propose to show that Jesus is with us in those very moments of profound change, whether something is ending or something new is beginning, God is with us, calling us, holding space for beginnings and endings, in the midst of it all reminding us that we are not in it alone.*

Judas has left the room. The remaining apostles are gathered in the Upper Room, celebrating Passover. It is the night before Jesus dies. Jesus has predicted that someone will betray him and then looks at Judas and tells him to do whatever he is going to do quickly. Then begins what some scholars refer to as Jesus' Farewell Address. In John's Gospel it goes on for more than four written chapters.

A portion of this address that is near and dear to many of us begins with Jesus saying, "Do not let your hearts be troubled, believe in God, believe also in me. 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..." (John 14:1-3).

We know that Jesus speaks these words to his friends the night before he dies, they have no idea what is going to take place these next few days. They believe that they are on the eve of his triumph, 12 hours later and they are convinced they are in the midst of a chaotic end.

Then three more days later a whole new way of mission and ministry begins.

The end and the beginning, the beginning and the end. Do not let your hearts be troubled, for in the midst of it all, God is with us. In the midst of deep transition, whether it is pain or joy, God spans the chasm, "Do not let your hearts be troubled, believe in God, believe also in me."

Several years ago a couple in my congregation got pregnant after an extensive period of trying. I remember praying with them before Stephanie got pregnant and rejoicing with them as they received the good news! Twins!! Stephanie and Scott were going to have twins, We were all over the moon.

Time went by and Stephanie wound up going into labor two months early. It was a difficult birth and both of the twins wound up in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. Stephanie was also hospitalized.

Stephanie and Scott were ecstatic and terrified all at the same time. As the hours went by it became clear that their daughter little Julia was stronger than her brother David. It seemed that there had been a small tear in the amniotic sac surrounding and protecting Julia and David. Because of where David was positioned in Stephanie's womb the doctors were unable to detect the tear. It is likely that David's little body blocked the hole and

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enabled Stephanie's pregnancy to go on for several more weeks, thus giving the twins a longer chance to develop and a greater chance of survival upon birth.

For several days Julia and David were side by side in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit in little matching incubators. Stephanie and Scott would visit their little ones at the same time with their right hand in little Julia's crib and their left hand in little David's. After a day or so Julia began to stabilize, but David continued to struggle. And yet, the fierce power that little David had to grasp and hold tight any finger that we offered him was breathtaking.

If you put your extremely clean finger into his incubator his hand would quickly find it and wrap his delicate fingers around and hold on and hold fast. Little David, lived 8 days, 8 days that profoundly transformed all of us. His sister Julia is now almost 7 years old. I marvel every time I see a FB post of her activities.

I remember what I wrote in my journal the day little David died, "David died on Wednesday. I visited with Scott and Stephanie not long before, anointing him another time. An hour later I came back and sat with them and got to hold little David while he was still warm." We sat, Stephanie holding Julia, Scott touching Stephanie and me holding David, the three of us nestled close together in Julia's room, saying little. "I know of few other moments that approach such holiness in my ministry."

Eight Days.

David was an old soul who taught us how we might dare to live. Giving all he had every moment of his little life. Working, fighting, striving with all he had. And reaching out—in his little incubator, with his myriad of medical accouterment – we and he had limited access to his precious body—but over and over again—when we reached a finger in to touch him—he wrapped his hand tightly around ours—so that we knew we were all in it together.

Together. Among many things, he taught us to strive and fight with all that we have and to resist the notion that we can do it alone. Together he called us together. At the end and the beginning.

Jesus has promised to be with us always. Let not your hearts be troubled, but believe in God and believe also in me.

In this fraught time, filled with pain in our world, discontent in our country and a restless, uneasiness in our institutional church, I invite all of us to remember what Jesus said to his closest of followers on the night before he died, "Let not your hearts be troubled."

In the midst of all that is, may we know that we are all in this world together. Great or small, weak or strong may we all reach out, one to another, in our beginnings and endings, may we reach out and remember that we are not in this world alone, but together with each other and with Christ our Lord, who said, "Let not your hearts be troubled, believe in God."