

Christ Episcopal Church

2 Emerson Street

East Norwalk, Connecticut 06855

The Fifth Sunday in Easter (A)

May 7, 2023

A Sermon by the Rev. Joseph Parrish

DRAFT

“Troubled?”

The Holy Gospel according to

John 14:1-14

Jesus said, "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 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. And you know the way to the place where I am going." Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him." Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has

seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it."

Give us today our daily bread. Amen.

When someone comes to the hospital emergency room with a serious medical condition due to accident, disease, fever, whatever, and when they seem limited in their responsiveness, the medical staff will often verify how the person is oriented in terms of four things: person; place; time; and situation. And the patient's response is recorded in their chart: such as, person is oriented as to person, but nothing else; or perhaps the patient is aware of where they are, such as in a hospital and they know their name, but little else; and so on. But

a person's mental status gives a instant clue oftentimes of how serious their condition may be. If the person cannot answer all of the foregoing questions it gives the examining team some direction of how to proceed. And any deterioration will be taken as a escalation of their need for emergency treatment. Maybe a simple saline infusion will bring their blood pressure into a more normal range if they have been losing blood; or quickly cooling a hyperthermic overheated person will bring their temperature more in line with normal. And if the patient's clues and symptoms are read correctly, the remediation can result in rapid mental as well as physical improvement.

However, I recently tried to discuss something with a person with Down Syndrome, Trisomy 21, and discovered that although they were quite fit and healthy, the concept of yesterday and tomorrow meant nothing to them. They simply lived in the present and were very comfortable with their situation. And my observation was that they were perfectly happy with how things were going today.

This raised in my mind that what often disturbs us is not having the deficit that this Trisomy person had: instead we are overburdened with what happened yesterday and overwhelmed by what we think we need to accomplish tomorrow. We are in a way creating

a personal deficit by becoming disoriented about the more important key elements of mental health, of knowing who we are, where we are, what time it is, and our ability to calmly evaluate our situation. We thus become unbalanced, “unglued” is a shorthand term for our status. As a result, our planning ability becomes distorted, we lose track of what is really important in our lives, and we tend to fail to achieve even the simplest of goals.

I am a medical student, and I really love what I am doing and what I am learning, but when an exam looms, I often tend to shift into high gear, and skip the necessary lower gears or necessities.

When we plan for tomorrow, we need to look at each step, and have a mental picture of where we are and where we hope to be tomorrow, or next month, or next year. Yet we can get caught up in either only the short term or only the long term, and we miss all sorts of goals in between because we forget to build on each necessary step.

I sometimes step back and say there are a trillion things that can go wrong with a person's body, and we know how to remediate about a billion of them, but knowing that billion can save or improve many lives even if we cannot do much of anything about the 999 billion things we know nothing or too little about.

Thus, we need to focus on the doable, and leave to God the rest. Knowing and using our abilities and respecting our limitations keep us from becoming paralyzed from doing nothing. Thus, we need to turn to others who we know to accomplish even more than what we ourselves alone can do. This is the beginning of teamwork.

In today's gospel, Jesus was trying to test his disciples, his team, to see if they understood their future responsibilities, as his remaining time on earth was exceedingly small. Jesus speaks about the way, but Thomas became distracted by the goal. The goal is helping to bring others into the Kingdom of Christ. The

way is love. But achieving the goal is far beyond our human capabilities. So if we focus on the goal, it is clearly far too overpowering, and even impossible for us to accomplish. We need to step back and focus on the way of love. In fact, Christians for many decades were called People of the Way (People of the Way of Christ), not “Christians”. When we began to think of our identity instead of our obligation to Christ, we began to miss our true calling, to be People of the Way of Christ. We are not called to be “Christians”; we are called to be followers of the Way of Christ. We cannot “be” Christ, we can only follow Christ. We cannot “be” Christ, we can only humbly follow Christ.

Other religions have similar problems: some will tell a follower to do this and do that, and God will love them more; but the rigid steps which were supposed to bring a follower closer to God end up being a stagnant set of rules that blind the person of being closer to God's call for us. And we end up following various and sundry rules, thinking how close we come to each rule will please God; but we are missing the way of bringing God's kingdom to earth as it is in heaven. The rules bring us into a stilted relationship with God and our neighbor, not one where true love is expressed.

We may say our prayers each day, but we forget to be loving in our relations with each

person we come into contact with. We have focused on our internal goals instead of God's goals for us.

We can become people In the Way of others, blocking the way of others, instead of On the Way of Christ for others.

But being On the Way of Christ can seem daunting, too difficult, impossible even, as it surely is, but as Christ's followers we are assured that our way is a way that Christ oversees and assists in many miraculous means and ways.

Let not our hearts be troubled.

Amen.

“Troubled?”

Description: Knowing who we are called to be and following the voice of our Savior is the way out of trouble.

Tags: mental, health, hospital, emergency, person, place, time, situation