

Sermon for May 14, 2017 – Easter 5

John 14:1-6 (Evangelical Heritage Version)

Theme: Believe in Christ

- 1) *His promises put our hearts at rest*
- 2) *He is the only true hope we have.*

*“Do not let your heart be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. <sup>2</sup>In my Father’s house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you. <sup>3</sup>And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to be with me, so that you may also be where I am. <sup>4</sup>You know where I am going, and you know the way.”<sup>5</sup>“Lord, we don’t know where you are going,” Thomas replied, “so how can we know the way?”<sup>6</sup>Jesus said to him, “I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father, except through me.*

What does our sermon text have to do with Mother’s Day? Truth be told: nothing. But for me, everything. Let me explain what I mean.

My mom has cancer, which I believe is non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma. She’s had it for a while. Even though it isn’t spreading rapidly, it has already gone into her bones. She is undergoing a mild chemotherapy but, save a miracle, her cancer probably won’t go away.

My mom has remained very positive throughout her treatments. She told me a story about how her oncologist set up an appointment to talk to her general practitioner because she misinterpreted my mom’s positive attitude as “non-acceptance.”

No, my mom understands the oncologist’s diagnosis. She accepts the fact that her cancer is not going away. Even more than that; she trusts what the LORD says in the Bible about her true condition. And what is that? That her life remains in her Savior’s hands. She could die tomorrow or live many more years. Regardless of what happens, she knows that her Savior loves her and will work in all things for her eternal good. My mom’s heart is at peace because she trusts Jesus’ promises of forgiveness, life and salvation.

Do you now understand why this sermon text that has nothing to do with Mother’s Day has everything to do with it for me? Jesus’ words are the source of my mom’s hope. The LORD wants them to be the source of your hope as well – regardless of the difficult situations you may be facing in life. Let us consider this truth under the theme: **Believe in Christ.** 1) *His promises put our hearts at rest* 2) *He is the only true hope we have.*

Part One: His promises put our hearts at rest

Jesus spoke the words of our sermon text during the final Passover meal he celebrated with his disciples on the night before his crucifixion. He spoke candidly with them about what was about

to happen, but the disciples didn't understand it. Because of the sorrow and worry that filled their hearts, Jesus said:

*“Do not let your heart be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.*

*Do not let your heart be troubled* - oh, that these words were spoken to us! Why do I say that? Because our hearts are often troubled, aren't they – concerned about our community, worried about the health of our loved ones, fretting over our finances. Add to this the guilt we may feel over past sins or the really big problem that pops up in our lives (like cancer or another major health problem) – and you have gut churning anxiety!

Thankfully, Jesus words were not just meant for the disciples. He speaks them to us as well! Do not let your hearts be trouble by all the things that can trouble them. *“Believe in God,”* Jesus says. Trust what the LORD says in his Word about his power and faithfulness. Understand that God the Father loves you dearly – so much so that he sent his one and only Son to save you from your sins. He takes no pleasure in our suffering, but promises to use all the hard, painful and outright evil things we Christians experience in life for our eternal good. Our loving God allows trouble in our lives so that we look to him alone for help and mercy; clinging to him as a child clings tightly to his parent's hand when walking through a great crowd.

And why should you trust God? Because the LORD is not a man that he should lie. He keeps his word. Proof of this fact is Jesus himself, which is why he says, *“believe also in me.”*

Yes, believe in Jesus, who is one with the Father. Believe in Jesus, who is the fullness of the deity in bodily form. Believe in Jesus, who calls you to turn to him in repentance and faith for the forgiveness of sins. And why should you believe in him? Because he gives your life a purpose, meaning and hope that even death can't destroy.

He says: . <sup>2</sup>*In my Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you.*

Jesus promises his believers a wonderful future. In his Father's house there are many mansions – that is to say, there is room for a lot of people: people he wants to adopt as his children so that they might live with him forever in glory. You are one of those God wants in heaven. For this very purpose he sent his Son to this earth: so that he might prepare a place for you there.

And how did Jesus prepare a place for us in heaven? By suffering and dying for our sins on the cross. Jesus paid for our sins in full so that, through faith in him, we might stand righteous before God on judgment day and be welcomed into his heavenly home.

Yes, through his sacrifice on the cross, Jesus prepared a place for us in heaven. But that is not the only thing he did. He also rose from the dead, ascended into heaven and sat at the right hand of God, from where he guides history in such a way that you could hear his Gospel. He sent his Holy Spirit to declare you an heir of heaven at your baptism. Through Word and Sacrament, Jesus continues to guide you through out your life – accomplishing his will through you for the benefit of others as he guides you home.

*“<sup>3</sup>And,” Jesus says, “if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to be with me, so that you may also be where I am.” <sup>4</sup>You know where I am going, and you know the way.”*

Remember how I said that faith in Jesus gives our life purpose, meaning and hope? Here we see why: our life on this earth is not the end all and be all of our existence. *This world in its present form is passing away,<sup>i</sup> but the man who does the will of God lives forever.<sup>ii</sup>*

Jesus is coming again to take all believers home to live with him forever in paradise. This truth changes our perspective on everything. Because this is the case, Christ’s promises lead us to loosen our grip on this world. What happens in politics, who wins in sports, luxuries, experiences, all the bucket lists we have, etc. . . we see that these things are not truly important. What matters most is Christ and his promises. Because of the salvation he won, death no longer terrifies us. The passing of loved ones doesn’t devastate us. Why? Because we know that we will be with our believing loved ones again in God’s house, where no sin, disease, disaster or death will ever be able to separate us from Christ or each other.

In this hope my mother lives. In this hope I also live because my mother and father passed their faith on to me by bringing me to Christ. And I am sure glad that they made this their priority over academics, sports or other hobbies. Why? Those things are for this life. My hope in Christ is forever. On top of this, Christ is the only true hope any one can have.

Part Two: He is the only true hope we have.

There is a popular belief in the world that it doesn’t matter what you believe so long as you believe and are a good person. “All religions are basically the same,” people say, “Just pick and choose the one you want and you will get to heaven.”

Is this true? Consider what Jesus answered Thomas, when he said: <sup>5</sup>“*Lord, we don’t know where you are going. . . so how can we know the way?*”<sup>6</sup>Jesus said to him, “*I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father, except through me.*

Our society responds: “Shouldn’t a person be able to choose what’s right for them, instead of having some truth forced upon them? How unloving!” How sad that Jesus’ words are viewed this way.

Let me ask you, would it be loving to tell a person at an airport to take whatever plane he wants because they all fly to the same destination? No, that would be mean because all planes do not fly to the same place.

What about a sick person in a pharmacy? Should we tell them to take any drug they find behind the counter because they are all the same and will heal their condition? Of course not – that could kill him . . . and the same is true regarding religion.

Jesus is the only way to heaven. Why? Because he is the only person who has ever come from heaven. The LORD is holy and cannot tolerate the slightest sin in his presence. This puts mankind in a pickle because we are anything but holy. Only through Christ – the sinless Son of God who took away the sins of the world – can we approach the LORD. Only in Jesus do we see the truth about who God is: his justice, power, mercy and love. Only through faith in him who died for our sins and rose again do we find the forgiveness, life and salvation we so desperately need.

Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. No one can come to the Father - that is to say, no one can inherit eternal life – except through faith in him. This is why I consider my faith to be the greatest gift my mother and father passed on to me. They presented me for Baptism, brought me to church, instructed me with the Gospel and showed me by their example what it means to be a Christian. My hope in Christ is the greatest gift God gave me through my parents, and I pray that every Christian parent will consider it their greatest duty and privilege to share that same hope with their children. Why? Because Jesus is the only true hope anyone can have. Only he can forgive our sins and open heaven for us. Only he can save.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: whenever the trials of your earthly life get you down – troubling your heart in such a way that you don't know where to turn - remember Jesus' encouragement to you: *“Do not let your heart be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. <sup>2</sup>In my Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you. <sup>3</sup>And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to be with me, so that you may also be where I am.”*

May our spirits reply: Amen: come soon, Lord Jesus, to take us home with you. But until that day comes, calm our troubled heart with your loving presence. Help us live our lives to your glory – knowing that *our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us<sup>iii</sup>* when you come again to fulfill your promise. Amen

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<sup>i</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:31 NIV84

<sup>ii</sup> 1 John 2:17 NIV84

<sup>iii</sup> Romans 8:18 NIV84