

Sermon: Easter 5 (A)

St. Peter's, Norfolk

Text: John 14:1-14

Date: May 10, 2020

Have you ever had one of those days when everything seems to go wrong? It doesn't matter how hard you try, it just seems that everything backfires on you! And the harder you try, the worse it gets. We've all had days like that, haven't we?

A woman named Jane was having a day like that. She had arrived at the airport for a flight earlier than she expected, so she bought a candy bar (a Kit Kat) to eat while she was waiting to board the plane. The waiting area was crowded but she spied an empty seat at the end of a row. Rushing to get it, she quickly propped her carry-on bag against the end of the row, sat down, and placed her purse and several small items on the table between her and a rather large man sitting across from her. She then turned back to put the sweater she had been wearing next to her carry-on bag.

With everything finally in order, she was ready to relax and enjoy her Kit Kat candy bar. But to her surprise, as she started to reach for it, she saw the man across from her un-wrapping her Kit Kat and she watched in utter amazement as he broke off a section and ate it.

"Of all the nerve!" she thought to herself, ***"I can't believe this guy is eating my candy bar!"*** She glared at him and he looked at her, but no words were exchanged. Well, Jane was so furious at what the man had done, that she decided that if he was going to be that brazen about it, she could be brazen, too. So she reached over to him and with a smug look on her face broke off a piece and ate it herself. Then he broke off another piece and ate it. And so, it became like a duel between the two of them to see who would get the most. Quickly the candy bar was consumed and she sat down, just fuming that anyone would be so rude and so presumptuous as to eat another person's candy bar.

Well, after a few minutes of silence, the man got up and left, but returned with another Kit Kat candy bar. He un-wrapped it broke off a piece and started eating it. She thought, ***"Well, since he ate half of mine, I'm going to eat half of his!"*** So she reached over and this time, with a look of defiance, broke off a piece and ate it.

Once again, they dueled until the whole candy bar was gone. She sat there thinking, ***"This is the most ridiculous thing that has ever happened to me in my whole life!"*** She continued to glare at the man and he looked at her, with neither one of them saying a word.

Just then, the announcement came over the intercom that her plane was ready for boarding. So she grabbed her purse, opened it to get her boarding pass, and (to her utter embarrassment) there was her Kit Kat candy bar- just where she had placed it after she bought it. She had eaten half of two of this guy's candy bars, and her candy bar was still in her purse!

With her head down, too humiliated to even make eye contact with the man, she quickly boarded the plane and took her seat. With a deep sigh, she thought, ***"What a horrible mess, I've never been so embarrassed in my whole life! Thank God it's over!"*** A few moments later, the man appeared- he had a ticket for the seat next to her. What were the chances?

Sometimes, things just seem to go from bad to worse, don't they? Sometimes things start going wrong and then they begin to snowball, and then you begin to feel like everything around you is crumbling and you wonder, ***"What in the world is going on?"***

That is probably the way Jesus' disciples were feeling in our Gospel reading this morning. Their week had begun gloriously with Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem- people waved palm branches and shouted, ***"Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the King of Israel!"*** (John 12:13) Even the Pharisees and the Chief Priests (who had been plotting against Jesus) cried out in despair, ***"See, this getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after Him!"*** (John 12:19)

But you see, Jesus had not come to establish an earthly kingdom and he refused to wear that crown. And so, disappointed and stifled in their dreams of a Jewish kingdom with Jesus as their miracle working king, the fickle crowd began to change. And soon the priests were once again looking for a way to get rid of Jesus....perhaps they could get someone to betray him into their hands.

So, as our Gospel reading opens, we see Jesus and his disciples in the Upper Room where they have eaten the Passover meal together. Jesus knew exactly what the next few hours would bring. He knew Judas would betray him. He knew about the illegal trial that would soon take place and how troubled his disciples would be. He knew the cross was coming and his death. He knew about all these things, and so, he began to prepare his disciples for them. How did he do that? He began to comfort them.

Sometimes we need to be comforted, too- don't we? Sometimes, things happen in our lives that defy explanation: we lose loved ones... we lose jobs.... we have physical problems....and medical problems....we are suddenly caught in the middle of a pandemic. Some of us are lonely and depressed. We experience all kinds of problems and our hearts become troubled.

But Jesus said that part of the solution to a troubled heart is trust. And he goes on to tell his disciples to trust in three specific things: ***“First of all, trust in my presence. Secondly, trust in my promises. Third, simply put your trust in me.”***

Jesus began by telling his disciples, ***“Do not let your hearts be troubled by what is to come. Trust in God. Trust also in me.”*** In other words, ***“I know you trust God, now it's time to start trusting me, too. But more than that, there is a time coming when you will see me no longer; even then, don't stop trusting in me- trust in my presence!”***

We always find it easier to trust in things that we can see and touch. We all have a little bit of the disciple Thomas in us, don't we? Remember, Thomas is the one who (when told that Jesus was resurrected from the dead and was alive) said, ***“Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my fingers where the nail marks were, and put my hand in his side, I will not believe it!” (John 20:25)*** For good old Thomas, seeing was believing.

Well, a week later, Jesus showed Thomas everything he had asked to see....and Thomas believed. Then Jesus said to him, ***“Thomas, because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. (John 20:29)***

The Bible teaches us that many of the things we can see and the things in which we place our trust are merely temporary. Our cars on which we rely so much and trust to get us from place to place are temporary. So, too, are our homes, and jobs.

Our churches buildings, the pews in which we sit, the pulpit, the altar- all of them are temporary.... all of them are subject to decay. Our very bodies are subject to decay- as some of us are beginning to realize. All the things of this earth....all the things you can see and touch....all the things of this earth in which you place our trust are only here for a little while, and then they are gone. But the things you can't see. They are eternal.

This is hard for us to understand, isn't it? But it's so important because when we face troubles and difficulties in life, we need to remember (as Christians) that Jesus has promised, ***"I will be with you always. I will never leave you nor forsake you. Trust in my presence! Even though I'm not "physically" visible to you, trust in my presence!"***

"And while you're at it, you can trust in my promises, too." You know, Jesus has made some great promises. Among the greatest is when He told his disciples (and us), ***"In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you may also be where I am....I promise that!"***

God made many promises both in the Old and New Testaments. He promised the Children of Israel a land where they could settle and become a great nation. He called it ***"a land flowing with milk and honey."*** It took a while for the promise to be fulfilled, but it was fulfilled.

God promised a Messiah, an anointed One, who would save His people and establish His kingdom on earth and in heaven. That took a long time, but it, too, was fulfilled when Jesus, the Savior, was born.

And now Jesus promised that someday He is coming back for us and that someday we will be with Him forever and ever. It's hard to wait and sometimes we grow impatient as we wait, and we begin to wonder, ***"Can I trust anymore?"*** But God keeps His promises and this promise of eternal life with Him in Heaven will be fulfilled, too.

The Bible uses several different words to describe heaven. In one place, it is called ***"a country"*** implying its vastness. In another it's called ***"a city"*** indicating a large number of inhabitants. It's also ***called "a kingdom"*** indicating that there is a governmental structure to it- a monarchy in which Jesus is King of Kings. Jesus called it ***"paradise"*** indicating its beauty and desirability. But here, he calls it ***"My Father's House"*** which is another way of saying, ***"It is home."***

Home is a place where you can be yourself and relax. Home is where you can say what you're thinking. Home is where you are accepted and loved. You're not just a guest....you are a resident. You live there. That is home.

Jesus is saying, ***“I’m going to take you My Father’s House, and it will be your home, too. There are many rooms there and I am going there now to prepare a place for you. I will come back and take you to be with me.”*** What a comfortable promise!

When will that happen? It will happen for each of us at our appointed time. Then the promise will be fulfilled and we’ll be in the Father’s House... we will be home; and we’ll get new bodies and we won’t have to worry about getting old and sick and all the other things that plague us now. ***“Trust in that....trust my promises,”*** Jesus said.

And then thirdly, Jesus told his disciples, ***“Trust in me. You know the way to the place where I am going.”*** Thomas said to him, ***“Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”*** Jesus answered, ***“I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”***

What a wonderful and comfortable promise that is! Jesus is saying (to them and us) ***“I’m not just going to show you the way, or tell you the way, or write out instructions on how to get there. You won’t need a GPS because I am the way! Trust that I’m going to come and take you by the hand to My Father’s House.... Trust that I’m going to bring you home.”***

Do you have things that are troubling you this morning....things that you just can’t seem to bear? Are you feeling overwhelmed? Are you worried or anxious? Do you feel empty inside? Do you feel lonely or lost? Whatever your burdens are today, remember- the solution to a troubled heart is still the same- to trust; to trust in Jesus’ presence. ***“I’ll never leave you,” He said. “I’ll always be with you, beside you, carrying you....trust in my presence. And trust my promises. When everything seems dark and gloomy....when everything seems to be falling apart....remember my promises. Then, trust in me. You won’t get lost. You won’t go astray. I am the Way and I will take you by the hand and lead you to my Father’s House.”***

“Don’t let your hearts be troubled...”These are the ***“comfortable”*** words of Jesus for his disciples (past and present). Trust in God....trust in him. Amen.