Jesus’ words from the gospel of John assigned to this Sunday start with an unsettling command: “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.”

How can our hearts not be troubled in these very troubling times?

My heart is troubled at seeing so many people still dying of Covid-19. My heart is troubled at hearing of how many of our parishioners have family members and friends affected by this virus and are not able to see them, hug them, and console them.

My heart is troubled that too many are not taking this virus seriously and are putting others at risk…

My heart is troubled at the countless inequities this pandemic has uncovered in our society (inequities which have always been there, but which my own hardened heart has been unable or unwilling to see, or at least to think about for very long.)

Indeed, my heart is troubled that too many are forced to choose between earning a paycheck and endangering their own health or that of loved ones. I am bothered by the thought that some workers are deemed essential, yet their lives are expendable.

My heart is troubled that this virus is keeping us apart, that we can’t congregate for corporate worship, that we can’t hug and shake hands with one another, can’t sing together for singing would spread the virus more quickly than a cough. My heart is troubled and I feel constantly unsettled.

And yet, Jesus doesn’t seem to find trouble with his disciples whose feet he has just washed as a sign of love and humble servanthood and who will abandon him in the crucial hours ahead. He doesn’t seem to find trouble with an anxious and despairing world that favors moralistic judgment, lying, scapegoating of the innocent, and vengefulness. A world that resorts to demonization, mob behavior, and lynching. Ultimately, a world set on self-destruction.

Jesus tries to comfort his disciples by saying that in his Father’s house there are many rooms or dwelling places and that he goes to prepare a place for them. We often hear this text at funerals. People begin to get visions of having their own private room in heaven when they die. In many ways that understanding misses the point that a dwelling place is truly home only when it is with God. As St. Augustine writes in his Confessions, “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in You.” Having a room to ourselves is nice, but God making room for us to be in the Triune presence is even better.

Jesus, in other words, is saying that our lives are part of a larger Reality; that with him we are in the Father and the Father will never let go of us. He has no doubt that we can access that Reality through him, the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and that the many rooms in our Father’s house are made up of tender mercy,

of concern and care for one another,

of kindness and extravagant generosity,

of service,

of hospitality and community building.

There is a larger Reality that encompasses all of us, a Reality that strengthens us to the point of finding pleasure even in praying for our enemies especially when they abuse and violate us; a Reality that can be tasted and found to be good; that can offer shelter and has Jesus as the foundation stone.

The charge to abide and dwell with God is an invitation to hear and share a comforting word at a time and place of vulnerability. More than a charge to “get it together” and put on a brave face, there’s a permission that is given, to admit that we cannot control the things that trouble us.

Our rock and our salvation, indeed our dwelling place does not shelter us from the devastating power of nature, or the catastrophic results of a pandemic; it does not even protect us from people’s cruelty and self-serving schemes.

If by now we have finally come to realize that order and control in life are but an illusion that we keep chasing after and worship as an idol, we are in a better place. Once we are despoiled of our securities, our certainties, and our comfort, we realize we have put our faith in what cannot satisfy. We realize we cannot save ourselves. Our attempts are futile and our mind-consuming strife keeps us away from our true source of happiness.

This place of vulnerability, of helplessness, of spiritual nakedness, is, in fact, holy ground and saving grace. When we reach our bottom and turn to Jesus, our comfort and our peace, we find true rest. But that peace is not a private treasure to hold and protect; it’s not experienced in a vacuum; it is not ours to enjoy in isolation from others. That peace washes over us and replenishes us as we realize and welcome our interconnectedness; that indeed we are all siblings to each other and children of the same Father; that if one suffers all of us suffer and there is no justice until all are treated with equity.

In the midst of so much devastation, people are forced to talk about what freaks them most, the presence of death so close to our homes. Life is impermanent and Jesus wants us to focus our attention on what really matters.

How will we get ourselves there, in the comfort of our Father’s house? By embracing Jesus and what he stood for; by living by the same Spirit that gave Jesus life; by choosing to love even more fiercely, generously, lavishly.

After this struggle, we will look back and think, “Jesus was with me and I didn’t even know it.” God is here and knows that we are worried, upset, lost, and seeking relief. This is where faith comes in. Jesus says, “Do not let your hearts be troubled, believe in God, believe also in me.”

If we set our heart on Christ as we promised in our baptismal vows, then we present ourselves as living stones for the construction of a sanctuary for God, vibrant with life, with rooms that are brilliant with the light of Christ, and our lives become honorable offerings to God. Those who live a resurrection directed life become precious and valuable possessions, as royal dignitaries with spiritual inheritance and as priestly functionaries at the service of God.

Let us lift up in prayer all those who are worried, scared, and grieving. Let us hold each other in the spiritual confidence that God is always here with us. In gratitude, let us thank God for our new life in Jesus. Amen.