

“TRUSTING THE PROMISE”
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Elkton United Methodist Church
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All Saints’ Sunday

Revelation 21:1-6a

John 14 (selected verses)

It was not long before Jesus would go to the cross, actually it was on the night of the last supper that he shared with his disciples, that he had a conversation with them, a part of which is this morning’s Gospel lesson. Things were very tense. Jesus’ enemies were closing in on him, the end was coming, and so Jesus sat down with those closest to him. He told them that one of them would betray him, and another deny him, and then he said these words: “Do not let your hearts be troubled.”

I would imagine that not a few of them gathered around that table thought, “Not a chance of that. My heart is deeply troubled. Everything’s falling apart. You’ll be taken away from us and nothing will ever be the same again.”

I thought of that phrase a lot this week as I prepared this sermon, and thought of so many of you who would be coming here today with hearts touched by grief. I’m sure not a few of you heard people say things like that to you when your loved one died – things like “it’s going to be okay,” or “It was God’s will that your loved one died,” or “he or she is in a better place.”

When you’re going through deep grief, some of those words hurt rather than heal. I think back to earlier this year when our family, the extended Bunnell family had three deaths in pretty rapid succession. My father’s sister died in the spring, just two days shy of her 100th birthday. While we miss her and her zest for life, she certainly enjoyed great length of days, a full and wonderful life. So her funeral was not steeped in grief, rather wrapped in gratitude and celebration of the woman she was and how she lived.

However, not long before she died, one of her daughters-in-law died after years of battling cancer. She was a gifted artist, wife of my cousin Edward, mother of two, grandmother of four, and her passing was heartbreaking.

And then, just a few months after that, my other cousin, Edward’s brother Chip, lost his wife after a very brief illness. He and their family were crushed by her passing. So it seemed like, for a period of time this spring, we were continually back and forth up and down the NJ Turnpike to attend funerals of beloved family members.

“Do not let your hearts be troubled.” That’s a tall order when staring into the face of the death of someone you love. How can you not be troubled? Not when you’re not sure if you have the strength to put one foot in front of the other. Not when you’re overwhelmed with making decisions on your own. Not when the house is filled with silence, that place at the table is empty, and the world outside seems like it’s merrily rolling along when yours has been changed forever.

Oh, not letting your heart be troubled when you’ve lost someone you loved would seem pretty impossible, which is why we don’t stop reading with that first sentence. The passage goes on, and Jesus tells us why. He lays out the promise for us.

He tells us about heaven – that place filled with many rooms – that place of rest and peace, that place where there is no more sorrow or sighing, no more sadness or struggle, that place where those who die return home to the arms of the God who created them. That place that will be there for us one day.

He reminds us that life does not end when we draw our last breath on this earth, but it goes on for eternity in the house of the Lord. Therefore, we can be at peace now, for those we love, and for ourselves – knowing that, yes, it will all be well.

And, in the meantime, Jesus says, the Holy Spirit will be with you to give you everything you need, today, tomorrow and all the days ahead. And then he ends with these beautiful words: “Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you, not as the world gives do I give to you.” And then again, “Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”

Oh friends, today, on this All Saints Sunday, we lean on those promises of God. We know that they have carried us through this year when we’ve lost so many we loved so dearly. We have found comfort in the fact that those who have died are in God’s arms. We have gotten through each day knowing that the Spirit dwells with us and in us and will not let us go.

So today, our hearts are not troubled, but oh so grateful for the lives of the people we have loved and lost this year. They were so special, and we will never forget them.

Lillian, Nancy, Butch, Bill, Amee, Jackie, Bettie, Audrey and Maynard. They were each a part of our church family, and all so memorable. So many of them were parts of long and strong marriages – they leave behind such a legacy of love in their families. One was a beloved Avon lady, another spent years and years working tirelessly in our church kitchen, one was a coach on the soccer field, one had a record-setting marriage in the State of Maryland – 77 years! Still another could be

found every Saturday morning with his wife at yard sales, and several of the women we remember can be pictured surrounded by beloved grandchildren and great-grandchildren. There were two who helped tend our finances here at the church – one of whom loved all things Pittsburgh and the other who was never, ever without a smile on her face, even when she was sneaking into church late!

Oh, these dear saints, how we loved them, and how we miss them. But we are not troubled today, we are at peace knowing that they dwell in the place prepared just for them and have seen the Lord face to face. We trust the promises of God, and because of that, our hearts are not troubled, but oh so grateful.

In a moment, we'll remember the saints who have died since last November through the middle of October this year. After we see the video, we'll have a prayer and then sing the wonderful "Hymn of Promise." As we do, I invite you to come forward and place your flower in memory of a loved one in the vases here in the front. We'll sing as long as we need to – as long as it takes to remember those you have loved and lost.

So now, dear friends, let us turn to the screen, and remember the saints, as we trust the promises of God.