

²⁰ Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, ²¹ equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (Hebrews 13:20-21)

John 14:1-12: “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. ² My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. ⁴ You know the way to the place where I am going.”

⁵ Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” ⁶ Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”

⁸ Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.” ⁹ Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? ¹⁰ Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. ¹¹ Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. ¹² Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.

I remember well and early morning in July 1977. I was leaving home for Scottsbluff, Nebraska. I had just graduated from the Seminary and been assigned to Christ the King Lutheran Church, a new mission congregation in western Nebraska. It would be a two-day drive. I had been away from home before – to attend college and the seminary. I had travelled to Europe. I had spent a year for vicaring in Omaha. But this was different – a separation filled with uncertainty. When would I get home again? I still had three living grandparents. How long would they live? Would I see my parents again? How would I do as a new pastor and a single one at that? It was a separation filled with uncertainty.

That is pretty similar to today’s reality. Friends and relatives of nursing home and assisted-living facilities residents aren’t allowed to visit. At best is phone calls, Zoom conversations and seeing each other through glass. Final physical separations (a.k.a funerals) are truly difficult because of current limitations on numbers of people for gatherings.

Jesus knew that his departure, his separation, from his disciples would be truly confusing and difficult for those whom he nurtured by word and deed. So on the evening prior to his arrest he provided them with some comforting truths to ease the three-day separation that was about to begin as well as the permanent visible separation which would occur 40 days after his resurrection.

This morning his words speak about **A Separation Filled with Comfort**. This comfort is eternal. It is certain. And it is meant for the present.

1. Eternal Comfort

His arrest is imminent; his ascension would soon follow, so Jesus provides eternal comfort for each trouble and uncertainty in our daily lives. He begins this portion of his words to his disciples by saying,

“Do not let your hearts be troubled.” The idea in that word “troubled” is like rough seas with a huge surf or the churned up waters at the bottom of a water fall. Jesus says your heart can be calm. He assures us that we can face separations and uncertainties with calmness – without worry. He provides three reasons through which he will calm our troubled hearts. First he says, *“In my Father’s house are many rooms”*. He is talking about heaven, our permanent place of residence. He has a place and plenty of space for you and me. What sweet comfort – he not only paid for our sins and makes us holy in the eyes of our heavenly father. He also has a special place for each of us in his eternal joy-filled presence.

We can understand his next comfort by making it into a question: *“If it were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you?”* His point is that he will not abandon them or us. He’s not a liar. He always speak truth, so we can trust him. We can trust his final comfort: *I will come back and take you to be with me.* He will not abandon us. O, there may be some physical separation, but you can be certain that he will take you to heaven. May this eternal comfort sooth your heart despite the separations that you endure.

2. Certain Comfort

In response to Jesus Thomas speaks words of uncertainty: *“Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”* Thomas’ words summarize much of what we might think and feel in these days of great health, family, and financial uncertainties. If you haven’t spoken or thought similar questions, you no doubt have heard them: When will this end? What will the “new reality” be like? What is God doing?

Jesus responds with: *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”* He is the world’s one and only Lord and Savior – the way to heaven, the absolute truth, and the only source of eternal life. Verse 7 especially is comforting. It may sound like a rebuke, but Jesus is assuring us that through him we know God the Father. And not just know him but have an exceedingly close relationship with him who is our Creator, Preserver and the Author of our salvation.

The disciples had known Jesus now for some time. They had witnessed his works and heard his words for three years. Jesus comforts them now with the mystery of what these things meant: his oneness with the Father. Having known him, they know the Father as well. Connection by faith with the Son means connection with the Father as well.

Jesus continues with comfort which is sure: *“The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves.” (vs. 10b, 11)* Jesus’ teaching, confirmed by his miracles provide the absolute certainty that he is our Savior and Lord. The devil and his forces in the world and his work in our hearts strive unceasingly to rob us of comforting certainty, but Jesus is our victor. When Satan leads you to questions, worry, and doubt, remember that Jesus’ promises are certain, our redemption is complete. His presence in our lives and in eternity is absolute.

3. Present Comfort

Jesus wants his disciples focused not only on the certainty of eternal comfort. He directs them to comfort for the present times. In the final verse of this section of John 14 he says, *“I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.”* He is referring to the force believers will exert in his name in the world after his departure. And this will accomplish “greater things than these” (“my miracles”)! How can this be? Jesus’ works were done in the shadow of the cross, and his activity was confined to Israel. The disciples’ works will be done in the light of the resurrection, in the power of the Spirit sent by the exalted Christ, and will embrace the world of the Gentiles too.

The despondency of the disciples because of Jesus’ departure was to give way to joy and a sense of privilege because of what his departure would commission them to do. As their future co-worker Paul would one day write, *“Therefore, since through God’s mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart” (2 Co 4:1).* The events of the days ahead would not only see salvation won, but would also see these men sent forth with the joyful privilege of proclaiming their Savior!

This comfort for the present, despite the separations in our lives, directs us to live Christian lives. We seek out his will for us in His Word and then put that will into action in our daily Christian lives. That’s what Peter was talking about in today’s epistle lesson: *“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. (1 Peter 2:9)*

As you live your Christian life, you will find great comfort in doing his will as you wait to receive that eternal comfort.

In the very first verse Jesus said *“Trust in God; Trust also in me.”* The root of that word trust also means “Believe.” In the face of all the uncertainty and the departures and separations that occur in our lives, simply believe in Jesus. He is your certainty. He is your comfort.

14 years after I left home I said goodbye to my father the final time. I didn’t know it, but God chose to separate us physically till the end of time. We were living in Germany at the time of his sudden death. I don’t miss him as much as I used to, but there are always little triggers that evoke his memory. In fact, this coming Thursday would have been his 97th birthday. I know that as I live a Christian life I am honoring him and more importantly serving my God by declaring the praises of him who has called us out of darkness into his wonderful light. I know we will be reunited in the resurrection on the last day – Jesus gives us present, certain and eternal comfort in the face of the separations which we have to endure. Amen.