



And Jesus Said, "Let not your Heart be troubled."

Jesus Preaches On Human Anxiety

~ John 14

Of all the unpleasant emotions, anxiety ranks as the most common. All humans experience it at times. Even though science and technology have reduced many of life's dangers, our present age is still often described as "the age of anxiety."

If anxiety reaches a high enough level, it may result in a panic attack; if three or more panic attacks occur, a generalized anxiety disorder is said to exist. Most of us have had some simple phobias; these are the result of anxiety. Phobias range from fear of heights, fear of being closed in, fear of going out, to fear of spiders or snakes. Sometimes we reduce our anxiety by refusing to think about or participate in the things related to our special fear. We simply avoid those parts of life.

So it is with death. Most of us have some anxiety about death. That's why we try so hard to stay alive. That's why we have ERs, ICUs, 911, and policemen. When Satan stood before God to argue the case against Job, he made a strong point when he said, "All that a man has will he give for his life" (Job 2:4).

Jesus addressed one of our chief concerns when he said, "Do not let your heart be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:1-4).

Some people never take a realistic view of death. They always see death as a far off experience; even people in their eighties and nineties are often surprised by death. As Jesus talks about life after death, he has picked the supreme subject; he has taken aim at our chief anxiety. Some folk think of the text as, primarily, ...Well –nice for funerals. Yet, so far as we know, none of the Apostles were about ready to die. They were all young.

Most of our anxieties are rooted in this one granddaddy of all anxieties. What will happen to us when we die? We would like to think of death as a once-in-a-lifetime experience. The trouble is, we keep getting invited to funerals. And we shouldn't be surprised; we live in a world where everybody dies. None of us are exempt from this kind of heart trouble. There is nothing that can keep it from us. It goes to the rich as well as the poor. In the document drawer of my desk there is a set of instructions for our children, telling them what to do if we should die. We can't hire the best lawyer, or even the best doctor and

expect to escape it.

All of us are on a journey to a terminal called death. In this passage, Jesus tells us how to be comfortable on the journey. We're all hoping to safely arrive at "the house of the Lord forever." Jesus begins by saying "you believe; now, believe more." No doubt the disciples already believed. If the promise of heaven is not a comfort to you, then you need to believe more. We're all on a trip to a distant land; in fact, the trip is a trip home.

Now, how to get there. On most trips we need a map. I remember when Gloria and I first knew that we would be going to Cathlamet, Washington for our first ministry. Neither one of us had been west of the Illinois River. I was at the Mainesburg service station and Claude Palmer got out a map. Then, we discovered where that far away place was and how we might get there. It was a concern. My grandfather was a member of the AAA (he always had one of the AAA stickers on the back window of his 1957 Chevy Sedan), so he sent for a trip map for us. Since we were going in February, the AAA decided to route us by way of Texas; the road would have been 4,600 miles long. I decided to travel straight through the snow of Nebraska, Wyoming, Idaho and Oregon on old Route 30, clocking in at 3,200 miles instead. It was an anxious trip.

Jesus continued by saying, "And you know the way to the place where I am going" (John 14:4). Thomas objected, saying, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" (John 14:5). Then Jesus replied, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). The plain truth is, Christians are apt to undervalue the work of the Spirit within their own souls. They often fancy that they know nothing, because they don't know everything. What Jesus is saying here is that if you know me, you know enough. Don't get caught up in "studying" Christ; get caught up in "knowing" Christ. It's not an academic thing; it is a friendship thing.

A Christian is someone who knows Christ. Christ is the believer's way, Christ is all we need to know about truth, and Christ is the believer's solution to death --Christ is life. Without Christ there is no going, no knowing, no living. We'll get there with Christ; we'll live right with Christ; we'll be ready for death with Christ. Christ is the way to get through life. The people who are the smartest are those who trust Christ about death --"Because I live, you shall live also." There is nobody else to trust about death. By the same token, there's nobody else to trust about life and about how to live it.

However, Christ is not finished. Next, he talks about human productivity as an important factor in reducing anxiety about death. "Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father" (John 14:12). We have been left as workers on the earth.

God has created us with the ability to be productive in life. This productivity is part of our preparation for death. Erik Erikson observed that when people reach the final stage of life they are either braced up by *integrity* or they are overcome with *despair*. The outcome is determined by whether they were *productive*

or *stagnant* in the middle part of their lives. While it is important that we are productive in our various vocations, it is even more important that we make a spiritual difference in the lives of other people. Mid-life crisis or mid-life reevaluation is a direct spin-off of realizing that time is running out. People who are middle-aged and above know how to count. When they subtract their age from a realistic life-expectancy, they do a "count-down" of sorts.

When Jesus said "you will do greater works than I," certainly, he didn't mean miracles, or walking on water, or raising a man who had been three days dead. The greatest work anyone can do in life is to have an influence in bringing others to God. He was talking about the conversions which would take place under the Apostles and continue to our own day. Was it greater for an Apostle to raise up a sick man, who then died again, and has been dead for nineteen hundred years, or help someone find Christ, who then, lands in heaven forever? There is no greater work than the saving of a soul.

After all, "Can a leopard change his spots or an Ethiopian his skin? Neither can you who are accustomed to doing evil do good." The saving of souls and the changing of people is a marvelous, and a worthy work. The idea here is that when we have few regrets about how we used our lives, we are more ready for death. This idea is reflected in Paul's last writings, "I am now ready to be offered up, and the time of my departure is at hand." Why was he ready? "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." Productivity in life and readiness for death are inseparably linked.

God gives to every Christian the power to live the Christian life. Every Christian has the chance to make a difference. However, there is a qualification here; the power to do it is not ordinary --that is, "Not by the might of an individual or the combined power of a group, but by my Spirit says the Lord of hosts." God's work is not accomplished by ordinary means. That is why Jesus didn't try to take over the government, or buy a senator, or raise, yet, another army --he didn't have to. All that stuff had been done before by man. **There was a period of history when the church tried to do its work by the ordinary means of power and politics. In fact, it gained full control of the government. That period was called the dark ages. I fear the church has arrived there once again.** Of course many politicians lie --what is scary, is to listen to Christians explain what it is O.K. Christ did also say, "I am the truth." You cannot give up on truth. No! It is a denial of Christ. **Jesus,(our leader) is truth** --don't go against him!

Two means of power are offered: They are prayer, and the Holy Spirit (John 14:13-17). These are, indeed, an unusual path to accomplishing great work. Yet, everyone who kneels daily before God in prayer has a right to take comfort from his or her prayers, knowing that God will always give us what is best for us. When the Church begins to lack this kind of power, we have to wonder if it is secretly meeting with God in prayer.

Yet, the coming of the Holy Spirit is more than just a *means*, it is also a *presence*. "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you" (John 14:18). "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever" (John 14:16). "They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to

them" (John 14:21). The Holy Spirit is also a teacher, (John 14:26). We'll know whatever we need to know about living life right by following those holy inclinations --by following our hearts. People who live life right are people who know a great deal about dying. They can die well because they are ready to leave. Their work is finished.

The passage ends where it began, "Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid" (John 14:27). It is preceded by these words "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives" (John 14:27).

Many have written about death and the anxieties we have about it; yet, whether it is Robert Browning, or William Jennings Bryan, or John Bunyan, or Alfred Tennyson, they all refer to only one source. They each refer to Christ as their source. No wonder their writings have lasted.

I think Christ told us what we most needed to know about death. "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also." "To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord." That is good enough for me.

We shall be ready for the next life, if we determine ourselves to be productive through the Holy Spirit and prayer, helping other anxious people on their way toward Christ and heaven, always taking advantage of that comfort that comes to us by prayer, by Christ's own presence, and by accepting his invitation to enter into his peace.

What Jesus said here is all I've ever felt I needed to know about death and the life to come. We will be with him; we won't be alone. These are the two things I know about the next life --and they are enough.

"Love's redeeming work is done, fought the fight, the battle won, death in vain forbids Him rise, Christ has opened Paradise."

"Soar we now where Christ has led, following our exalted Head, made like Him, like Him we rise, Ours the cross, the grave, the skies."

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in me." I believe that Jesus said enough. It is no more complicated than that. Jesus is more than enough. Jesus is always more than enough.