

Acts 17:22-31 ~ John 14:15-21, 23
Since We are God's Offspring
May 10, 2020 ~ 5th Sunday of Easter ~ Mother's Day
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Introduction to Scripture

"Do not let your hearts be troubled." That's how Jesus begins this chapter of his parting heart-to-heart with his scared disciples in the Gospel of John. Of course, their hearts were troubled as he kept talking about his imminent departure. Anticipating their deep grief and disorientation, Jesus offered words of comfort and promise to sustain them. Maybe they heard. Maybe they didn't. It's hard to think clearly in the fog of grief.

A second layer of loss shrouds both of our scripture lessons. The first hearers of these texts, were living amongst the ruins and rubble of the second Temple, what had been the locus of God's presence and power. This devastation plunged them down, down to the depths of a communal grief. With Jesus and the Temple gone, what was their God of Resurrection doing now?

Today, our beautiful FPC sanctuary still stands strong and tall on the hillside, thanks be to God. But as long as we are unable to gather together and worship inside of it, we too feel a loss that tugs at our hearts. We wonder, when will we get to go to church again? And what will that look like? The losses around and within us, are legion. With 33.5 million jobs lost since March and one-fifth of the American labor force filing for unemployment, we are suddenly living in a land of economic loss and hardship. The pillars of our economy are being tried and tested. Even harder to fathom, is the heartbreaking loss of over 78,000 souls, who have succumbed to the coronavirus here in the USA. Each day the number rises, on Friday 1,734 more people died. Our troubled hearts may also be asking, what are you doing God, right now? And what are we supposed to be doing? If those are questions you are struggling with, Jesus has a word for you today.

Sermon

I have an older brother named Scott. He wasn't always an older brother. Back in 1954, my mother was an avid disciple of Dr. Spock. When she was nearing the end of her pregnancy with her third child, so she knew how important it was to prepare her three-year old son, Scott, for the earth-shattering experience of no longer being the baby of the family. She sat him down in the kitchen one afternoon when she knew that her delivery day was getting close.

She slowly and carefully explained to him that she would be going away to the hospital for a few days and why. She was really worried about how much he would miss her (back in those days delivering a child would be a four to five-day hospital stay). She wondered how he easily he would adjust to having this new baby in his life, so she talked about the changes and she encouraged him about his new job as "big brother." After going over all of this several times with him, she paused and waited to see how he was doing. To her surprise, he had just one question for her, "Who's going to be the cooker?"

The scripture you just heard, comes from a somewhat similar scene. Of course, it wasn't a mother about to leave her other children to go to the hospital for a few days to have a baby. It was Jesus preparing his disciples for his death on the cross. Jesus knew that his time on earth was almost over. He knew he would no longer have moments like these, sitting around a table with his disciples, being their flesh and blood human friend and leader as well as their teacher and Lord. He had to choose his words carefully. They had no clue of what was about to happen and how their whole world would shift underneath their feet.

The author of John doesn't tell us much about what the disciples were thinking or feeling. But we know what it feels like to have someone we love leave us and how scary changes like that can be. Based on our own experience we can guess the disciples' minds were likely racing with big questions and little ones, with yearnings and regrets, and probably some red-hot anger. Why would God do something like this to us? And now, "Who's going to be the cooker?" By that I mean, "Who's going to keep us together body and soul? Who is going to help us get on track and get going every morning?"

I think we can also be pretty sure they didn't hear much of what Jesus said at the time. It's hard to listen when you're scared or when you're in the middle of any crisis. You go into survival mode, you regress to fight or flight if it gets really bad (remember Peter cutting off the ear of the soldier, and all of the disciples eventually fleeing). Or you put on a brave face, go numb, and figure you'll sort it out later. At this pivotal inflection point for Jesus' twelve disciples, when the way forward was anything but clear, Jesus told them exactly what they needed to hear. He gave them a promise and a role. A promise and a role in the plan that would see them through. That promise and role is within us still today, right now. Whether we know it or not. Even if we are groaning and groping our way through each day.

Here's the promise "I will not leave you orphaned." We may feel like a motherless child. We have mixed feelings about our human parents. Mother's Day may be a complicated day for us emotionally. Our Divine parent is different. Our Divine Parent God nourishes and nurtures us. Jesus promises them and us: "God will be the cooker." And when we partake of what God is cooking up, we find the eternal in our step.

That's the promise. What's the role? In God's human family, we are neither the youngest in the family nor the first born, oldest. We have 7.8 billion siblings: all with a place at God's table: All equally loved, named and claimed. Whether they know it or not. Too many are suffering. We feel their pain because they are our siblings. Since we are God's offspring, we hurt and mourn the death of Ahmaud Arbery, the young man who was shot while being Black and jogging in his neighborhood in Georgia. Where there is no nurturing or nourishing, where there is no mutual care and respect: That's where our role comes in.

The question for us is not "Who's going to be the cooker" but, "what is my job, what is my role in the Cooker's kitchen to help other's find their place in God's family? God has a role for you that only you can do. Here's the good news: You are perfectly adequate to the task.

Whether it's caring for a loved one, keeping yourself safe, reaching out to people you know who might be feeling isolated, letting God's creativity work through you, as we wonder how God is calling us to reimagine ways to upbuild our community in the COVID context. God is calling us to work the tool that Jesus gave us, that tool is Love.ⁱ

Today, I am delighted to tell you about the amazing ways you all have responded to one project the Cooker has cooked up for us. One tangible way we can help others to know that they have not been orphaned or abandoned by our Parent God or by the community in which many of them have been literally putting food on our tables for us until they lost their job because of the shutdown. Yes, I'm talking about the "Free Basic Basket" food drop event here at FPC on May 16. Since last week, when I announced the \$2,000 seed grant for this project from MACFI: you all have donated an additional \$4,290 to help stave off the hunger in particularly among the immigrants living near us and among us. We have also had numerous people come forward to volunteer their time.

Our situation in Marshfield is not unique. Across the US, 41% of families with children under 12 are unable to afford enough eat. You may have seen the pictures of Food Banks, even in places like Egg Harbor, New Jersey with lines of cars a mile long waiting for food. People in Kenya, India, Colombia, Venezuela, Sudan, Zimbabwe, Iran, as well as refugees and people living in conflict zones add up to over 265 million of our siblings who are living with acute hunger today in our world. Wherever nurturing and nourishing, mutual care and respect are crying out to us: That's where our role comes in.

Friends, here is the good news. Our now doesn't have to equate with our forever. Whatever the future holds, we don't need to grope for God whose home is inside of us. Instead, with body, mind, and spirit we can ground our beings from this focused center, as Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "Our firm decision is to work from this focused center: one man died for everyone. That puts everyone in the same boat. He included everyone in his death so that everyone could be included in his life, a resurrection life, a far better life than people ever lived on their own." (2 Cor 5:14-15 Message Bible)

Since we are God's offspring, all chips off the divine block, we know God is in us and working through us as we find our role from this focused center, donning our aprons and our work gloves, (and for the time being our cloth masks) for the nurturing and nourishing of our whole human family.

ⁱ "What do We have to Do with Each Other? Witness to the Common Good," Christopher Edmonston, *The Presbyterian Outlook*, April 27, 2020, quoting The Rev. Katie Crowe.