

Squamish United Church
Rev. Karen Millard
Mothers Day - Easter 5

May 10. 2020

Scriptures

Psalm 31
John 14:1-14

Troubled Hearts

The psalmist says
I take refuge in you, Lord
Be the rock that protects me;
Jesus says Do not let your hearts be troubled

I have experienced a lot of troubled hearts this week. It was a heavy week for many. In a couple of meetings when we checked in people were clear that emotions were running high and often at extremes. Even though we are starting to be told we can maybe loosen up a bit for many the worry of that and what that looks like just piled on new worries and concerns. And so our hearts are troubled.

It is hard to believe that for many it was easier to hunker down into isolation, than figuring out how to head back out into the 'dangerous world.' At least when we are isolated with our little family we know we are safe. We have had refuge, safety, comfort, protection. At least for those of us who have kept our jobs or our homes we have known how to find comfort. Not so much for those who have lost their jobs, their business, their livelihoods, their dreams.

Perhaps mothers day is one of the perfect days to talk about protection and refuge. This is the day we are reminded of our own mothers or the mothering people in our lives that have offered us refuge and protection. Those we have gone to when our hearts are trouble. The emotions around mothers day are often complicated for people for a variety of reasons today however they are more complicated than usual.

People with elderly moms that they can't visit. Moms stressed by working from home while home schooling. Grandmothers who are taking care of their grandchildren a lot more than planned. Sheltering in place as moms or with our moms has brought a mixed bag of blessing and struggle.

And then there are those, including woman in our own congregation who have had their moms die in the last weeks some who were not able to be there to hold their hand or comfort them into the next stage of the journey, or organize a funeral due to coronavirus restrictions. We pray for all who are missing their moms on this day. This is a day with pains and joys and complications and

appreciations and hopes and dreams. This day is a day to embrace the spirit of comfort and love that is offered to all of us.

So then why do we wrestle? Why are our hearts still troubled? I want to be able to give you the five steps to trusting in God's refuge and strength, I want to tell you exactly what to do so that you will no longer have a troubled heart but the truth is I can't give you the steps or tell you how, just as I can't choose the perfect life partner or profession for you. It is only you who can know that in the depths of your soul but I can tell you what I long for and I can tell you what I get glimpses of and sometimes deep peace from and that is putting my trust in the rock.

The term "refuge" rings uniquely true in today's world. Under orders to "shelter in place," many of us are reconfiguring our domiciles to be fortresses against an unseen but deadly foe: COVID-19. Armed with masks and disinfectant, we raise the drawbridge and fortify our homes in a society-wide attempt to "flatten the curve."

For the psalmist, God is a "refuge" (*ma'oz*) from danger, and Jesus offers heavenly shelter for his disciples troubled hearts, promising to prepare for them a heavenly home. Today's texts remind us that to live on this earth is to live in a hard place. As if we needed a reminder.

Nobody says it better than Martin Luther himself, whose own times were afflicted by pandemics and plagues, he wrote in the hymn *A Mighty Fortress is our God*
And though this world, with devils filled,
Should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath willed
His truth to triumph through us:
The Prince of Darkness grim,
We tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure,
For lo! his doom is sure,
One little word shall fell him.

The reality is in this current pandemic some members of our society struggle to "endure" its rage more than others. Part of our struggle against COVID-19 has implored us to acknowledge and address the needs of those who are particularly vulnerable to the virus' cruel consequences. There are always those more vulnerable in society but right now we are being reminded of who they are and governments are being questioned about their care of the least of these more than they have in a long time. Many are being reminded that we in western culture have stopped honouring our elders and we have stopped noticing the underemployed and unhoused. Now is a time to love God and neighbour so that we do not hurt or harm but help and support everyone. We shelter in place and socially isolate for important reasons, not only for our own health but also for the health of others. It is actually selfish not to do so.

The peace of the Gospel offers does not come from our attempts to protect ourselves from earthly harm. No leader, vaccine, or test can truly bring peace. These are important and necessary measures for the flourishing of life in this world, but they do not bring the kind of peace of God offers.

Human precautions will offer a level of peace but nothing compared to abiding in peace, in comfort, in refuge, in love. The reason I am a person of faith is because God's peace does not depend upon a calm storm, the end of adverse conditions, or the removal of distress. Instead the peace of God holds us safely, even while we are under siege or in fear. The psalmist invites us to a deep trust in the goodness of God, even when God's goodness is hidden or obscure. It's what I've learned in the deep hard times when I have felt alone, distressed, afraid.

Jesus says to his distraught disciples. Do not let your hearts be troubled. I go to prepare a place for you. These verses might be familiar to you because they are often requested at funerals. I've always wondered what people think when they ponder the many dwelling places or mansions in the sky. I read it at funerals for people of every socioeconomic demographic. We all dream of a beautiful resting place when this hard life is over. I have an image that comes to mind when I think of that mansion in the sky. I see a big beautiful white house on a green grassy hill. For me it looks a lot like the Suttlemyer house (the home of a wealthy family that sat in the background of my grandparents home when I was a child). And yet, it's actually so much more beautiful than you could ever imagine, a mansion would be nice for eternity but better yet is a holy resting place. The appropriate translation of this verse is a place of comfort.

The "many" in this implies not to "lots of them" but rather *There's room for all, for everyone born*. A place of comfort for all a place to remain and abide in relationship with love, peace, comfort forever.

Honestly, I've never much considered these scriptures but in this time when hearts are troubled all around the world, in a time when safe refuge has a deeper meaning even for those of us who are used to a comfortable life. I realize how much I need to follow the Jesus way. Jesus says live my way, come my way not to make some theological statement that if you don't do it my way or pray a certain prayer you won't make it to heaven. Jesus says I am the way to peace, to comfort, to holy love. Live my way and your hearts will not be troubled because you will know that you are enough, you will know that you are not alone in the struggles and wrestles of life. Jesus says, I long for you to know refuge, I long for you to feel like you are standing on solid ground, on the rock, I long for your troubled hearts to be at peace.

Jesus knows, God knows life isn't easy. That is why throughout scripture he says 'do not be afraid' because he knows we are afraid. That is why comfort is offered when the holy one says 'do not let your hearts be troubled.' It is not a quick fix do it this way and life will be perfect. It is a come to me and I give you rest. Abide with me and you will know peace.

Holy God I pray this day for peace
May you enter into the chaos of this world

In such a way that we begin to rediscover calm
Quiet our hearts help us draw near to you.
Amen.