

Into your hands I commit my spirit

Psalm 31; John 14:1-14

The psalmist cries out “into your hands I commit my spirit.”

I don't know about you but I long to do this, yet I resist. I fight this I hold on for dear life to my sense of control my need to be in control of my life I feel as if everything is out of control.

Jesus says, “do not let your hearts be troubled.”

My heart aches God. I long for things to go back to the way they were. My heart wants to reach out and touch the hearts of my family and friends, to hold them again.

The psalmist cries out, “you redeemed me O Lord, faithful God.”

How will you redeem me, how will you rescue me from my own thoughts and words, how will you deliver me from my anger and what has been lost, how will you set me free from my confinement and from danger?

Jesus says, “I go to prepare a place for you.”

The gospel passage is one that we often hear at a funeral or a celebration of life service. For it offers hope and comfort to people who have been left behind to grieve. In times of sadness there is a deep need to believe that this is not the end. The words in the gospel of John are what Jesus said to his disciples in preparation for his own death. Jesus speaks these words to reassure the disciples that his death is not the end but the beginning of a new way.¹ Jesus recognized that this would be a difficult time, this will be an uncertain time for the disciples and so he invites the disciples to hang their hearts on God, to hang their hearts on him.² What is troubling for the disciples is that their time with God has ended. Jesus was the one that revealed God to the disciples and in many ways that shook the disciple's theology and their understanding of who God is. If God is all powerful and Jesus is strong and powerful and capable of seemingly doing the impossible by liberating people from oppression, how is it that he is the one that is defeated, that he is killed? Why wouldn't he use his power?

¹ Cynthia A. Jarvis, *Feasting on the Word*, Year A, Volume 2, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), p. 467.

² _____, p. 469.

Donald Senior, a biblical scholar writes that John's portrayal of Jesus is as a revealer of God. "God is revealed to us through words spoken by Jesus. Through healing touch Jesus reveals the compassion of God. Jesus' death is an act of love which reveals God's redemptive love for the whole world."³ Things had shifted for the disciples and we can hear their feelings echoed in the words of the psalmist today, words of release, the release of control, the release of fear, the release of pain and the release of joy. There are points in our lives and in our world where all that is left for us is to surrender. This is not a comfortable word for me especially when it comes to religion. It comes with a lot of baggage for me. The idea of surrender makes me feel like I must somehow turn off my brain, to simply accept things without thought, to be at the mercy of another; something that I am not comfortable doing. But over time and with thanks to Bono, of U2, whose birthday is today, I have come to see this word in a different light. There was a song that U2 wrote called The Moment of Surrender and here are some of the words in it. It says:

"It's not if I believe in love
If love believes in me,
Oh believe in me
At the moment of surrender
I'm falling to my knees,
I did not notice the passers by
and they did not notice me.
I've been in every black hole
At the altar of a dark star,
My body is now begging
Though it's begging to get back,
Begging to get back to my heart,
to the rhythm of my soul,
to the rhythm of my consciousness
to the rhythm of yes,
to be released from control."

After listening to the song repeatedly while I was at theological college the word surrender changed and what it meant for me that it was a moment where I turn to God. So, surrender was the way I get back; get back to really knowing what was deep in my heart, in my soul, in my consciousness. It was a time of connecting all that had become fragmented in my life. I feel as though we are at this moment right now. The moment when we are being called to let go of the past that we cling so desperately to. This is a time like the one that the disciples went through. The death of the old way of life into the new way of life. Our time has shifted.

I was thinking back to the last service we had in the sanctuary and as I reflected there was a somber atmosphere, we weren't able to go into fellowship and start chatting and eating and feasting as we normally do and as people left there was anger, there was fear, sadness. People didn't really want to leave, they kept talking to their friends as long as they possibly could, not

³ Donald Senior, *Feasting on the Word*, Year A, Volume 2, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), p. 471.

knowing whether and when we could be back in this space, but we as Christians believe that death is not the end though we are grieving what once was it is not over. There are so many passages in the Bible that talk about waiting for what is to come, for something new. Revelations 21: 1 says, "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and the sea was no more." Isaiah 43:18 says, "Do not remember the former things or consider the things of old. I'm about to do a new thing and now it's spring forth, do you not perceive it?" or Colossians 3:10 that says, "Clothe yourselves with a new self." And finally from Romans 12:2, "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good acceptable and perfect."

As Christians we rest assured that death is not the end and that there will be resurrection and transformation. Things will not return to their former glory, but something new will emerge out of the chaos. The act of creation is painful it's messy it's difficult and new life emerges. Jesus goes he says to prepare a place for us. Now it's not a place in the sense of space but rather a place in the sense of time. What will it mean for us if we too like the psalmist commend our spirits to God? What will it mean and look like if we surrender and place our trust in God knowing that a place is waiting for us, that God is waiting for us? Waiting to walk us to a new time. The disciples at the time when this passage was shared with the story was shared had no idea how this new faith how Christianity would look over 2000 years later. The people who built this sanctuary didn't know what this faith community would look like a 100 years later and we don't know how our faith community will look in 20 years; after this life changing time of pandemic.

What we can hold on to it what we know to be true is it times like this can bring us together in ways that we would never expect in a deeper way. I've been reflecting with the variety of groups of people from the church over the past weeks and asking them how is this time strengthened your faith? What will we remember about this time? What will we let go of in the future because of this experience and what will it look like when we're able to be back together? I find this so interesting to consider what the role of the church is now and will be in the future. What will it look like when we might be finally able to come together, but not placed together, to do our usual potlucks like they always had? What was reflected in those conversations is that this time has helped us to truly appreciate what we have, to truly appreciate what this faith community, what the people and the space offer not only ourselves, but others in our community. We recognize that there's really nothing we want to let go of. It's hard; hard to imagine letting go of something and yet we know that as time passes things will change.

The one thing I did hear was that maybe we will let go of some of our formality because we're really starting to appreciate this intimate conversation and way of worshiping together. I love that I am able to speak with each of you individually without being in fellowship and having this line up and getting one sentence in with each person as the next person comes by and instead being able to sit and be present truly present to you at different times in your life. I know that's what people are appreciating with each other; is being able to listen to people in their time of frustration. to be able to listen to people when they're angry and when they're full of joy. We're

all in different places and yet we all long and ache to be with one another worshipping God together and we are.

Part of the reason for putting the faces up there is so that I can pretend that I'm seeing you in your homes. I did write in my emails that I would love to see a picture of what your worship space looks like right now and I do want you to be honest. I want to know if you're sitting in your pajamas having coffee or tea. I want to know if the cat is watching just as much you. Please share these moments with us because I know that it's true. We have joked about maybe having a pajama party the first day back because some people will not be used to getting dressed up and coming to church. If you want to bring your breakfast you're going to have to because we're not serving food. These are all things to consider for the future knowing that no matter what we know that a place is ready for us, that God has time for us. And so, all we need to do is surrender to that and in the words of Colossian we need to clothe ourselves and our hearts with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. This is a time where we need to be gentle with ourselves, we need to be patient with each other and the world and this pandemic and we need to continue to find ways to show our kindness and compassion for others because that is what being church means. So, friends remember when you are out in this world appreciate what it is that God has given to us trust and commend your spirit to God and do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God. Believe in Jesus. Thanks be to God. Amen.