

ABIDE IN CHRIST

Over the past weeks a little phrase has kept going through my mind. These are words Jesus spoke: "Let not your heart be troubled." I believe they are so relevant for us today.

Jesus had been celebrating the Passover with the disciples and he has just revealed that one of them would betray him. Not long after that Judas Iscariot left. Now Jesus was alone with the 11 disciples, the ones who truly belonged to him, and he begins to share a heartfelt, intimate message with them. These are the last words Jesus spoke to them before he was crucified. The last words a person speaks are often significant and special to us. And these words certainly are. Jesus says:

John 14:1 "Do not let your heart be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in me."

Then he repeats the same words in v27,

John 14:27 Do not let your heart be troubled and do not be afraid.

All around us in the world today there is trouble. Most nations are affected by covid-19, and schools, churches and businesses are closed. Many families are facing financial difficulties, health issues and problems in relationships. Christians are facing opposition because of their faith. Yes it is easy for our hearts to be troubled.

So the words that Jesus spoke to the 11 disciples are relevant for us today. Jesus then goes on and gives 3 promises. And these are the reasons why we don't need to be troubled. Let's look at these now:

1. I WILL COME BACK AND TAKE YOU

John 14:1-3

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. 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."

Jesus had told them again and again that he was going to die, and that he would be raised from the dead – but now he is telling them that he is returning to his Father. And he says, "In that place where I am going, in my Father's house, there are many rooms – I am going to prepare for you to come and be with me."

I love the words, 'my Father's house'. I think it is the only time Jesus uses this phrase. Mostly he spoke of Heaven, or the Kingdom of Heaven – but this time he is using a phrase that is much more intimate. He is speaking only to those who truly know him. When it speaks of house here, it isn't

just a building – it is a word used for a household, a family. He is preparing a place for those who belong to him in his Father’s household

At the time of Jesus, in the culture of that day, when a young man wanted to get married he would first get engaged to the young lady, and then go back to his father’s house to build another room onto it. When everything was prepared he would go to fetch his bride and bring her back to his father’s house to the room he had prepared and the wedding would take place.

Jesus was giving a wonderful promise that he is preparing a place for all those who belong to him, in heaven, in his Father’s house. One day he will come for us.

There words of Jesus bring:-

1. **Comfort**

- We have the assurance that our eternal future is secure in him. We do not need to be afraid of death, because we have this wonderful hope. And I think as we get older this promise becomes even more meaningful. And what a comfort it is to know the ones we love who have already died, knowing the Lord, are with him now.

2. **Courage** – to face trouble

- Within hours of Jesus speaking these words he would be arrested and the disciples would be filled with fear and flee for their lives.
- Jesus knew that in the future they would face trouble too.
- In John 15:18 he tells them that just as the world hated him, the world would also hate them – just as he was persecuted, they would be too – they could even face death.
- All through history this has happened – those who love Jesus have often been hated by the world. More and more in Western countries too, Christians are not accepted by the main stream. Jesus said this would happen because they don’t know the Father.

So Jesus begins his final words to his disciples before he is crucified, by saying, “do not be troubled – I will come again and take you to be with me forever.”

2. I WILL COME TO YOU

Then Jesus gives another promise – and this time he says ‘I will come TO you.’ Let’s read:

John 14:16-20

“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him or knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me and I am in you.”

Jesus is saying that although he will be leaving, and he won't leave them alone. They won't be like orphans who have no parents, who have no one to provide for them and protect them. He says he will come to them. This is an amazing truth – one we know, but I am sure we don't fully grasp how powerful it is. Jesus begins to unfold this line by line, so they would grasp the significance of what he was saying.

I am in the Father and the Father is in me. 14:10

I am in my Father and the Father is in me. 14:11

I am in my Father and you are in me, and I am in you. 14:20

We (Father & Son) will come to him and make our home in him. 14:23

Counsellor (Holy Spirit), whom Father will send in my name. 14:26

Counsellor (Holy Spirit), I will send to you from the Father. 15:26

Counsellor (Holy Spirit), I will send him to you. 16:7

One moment Jesus is saying the Father will come, then he says the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit will come, and at other times that he would come. You see the Father, Holy Spirit and Jesus are one, there is an incredible unity between them, an amazing relationship.

Jesus is saying, "I am going away, but I am not leaving you alone – we will come and live in you." Wow. We become his temple, his dwelling place on earth, the body, priests and kings in his kingdom. NOW!

When we believe in Jesus we aren't taken out of the world. It is God's plan that we remain – he is sending us into the world, just as he sent Jesus into the world. But he gives this promise: I will be IN you. To help us understand what he meant, Jesus gave the example of a vine.

We know grapes have been grown in Israel for thousands of years. Remember the story of the 12 spies returning from the Promised Land, carrying bunches of grapes. When William and I visited Israel some years ago I remember standing on the site where the first tabernacle had been in Shiloh, and our guide pointing out vineyards on the opposite slope. He told us that to plant they had to literally dig holes in the rock, but some of the best wine in the world came from that place. The Jewish people understood what a vine looked like.

You see you can't separate the vine from the branches, they are one and the same.

EXAMPLE OF THE VINE John 15:1-4

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in

you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.”

Jesus had been teaching them that he was in the Father and the Father in him. Then he went on to say we are in him and he is in us. Now he begins explain what this really means.

- Notice he says ‘every branch in me’.
- Jesus uses that little phrase IN ME about 7 times in this chapter.
- Look in the passage we have just read - it says, in me, in me, in me.

TWO CHARACTERISTICS OF THOSE WHO REMAIN IN HIM

A. JOY

When Jesus spoke these words, he had just told them not to be troubled – he knew they would go through a difficult time, but look what he says:

“Remain in me ... so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.” John 15:11

Notice that Jesus says, “My joy.” Jesus was and is full of joy. It overflows from him and he is saying when we remain in him our joy will be complete. The meaning of that word complete is to fill to the full. You can’t get any fuller than that!

Then Jesus speaks about joy again in John 16. When a woman has a baby there is pain, but then there will be joy when the baby is born.

This week a baby girl was born that brought great joy to many of us. You see when the mother went into premature labor they were advised that the best option was to terminate the pregnancy, but we prayed – and God worked. Their baby has safely arrived.

Jesus knew the disciples would go through a time of grief, but he assures them that they would then have a joy that no-one could take away. No-one can take the Holy Spirit from you. This is what Jesus then wrote:

“...and you will rejoice and no-one will take away your joy.” John 16:22

“... and your joy will be complete.” John 16:24

Later when Jesus prayed with his disciples, this is what he prayed:

“So that they may have the full measure of my joy within them.” John 17:13

When we abide in him, in his love, we will have joy.

B. PEACE

Another mark of someone who is abiding and remaining in Christ, is peace.

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give you as the world gives. Do not let your heart be troubled and do not be afraid.” John 14:27

“So that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” John 16:33

This amazing person – the Godhead lives in each one who has been born again – he is love, and peace and joy flow from him. Jesus had told them they would face trouble, but as they remained in him, they would have peace and joy. And we can too!

The key is to remain in him. Jesus promised he would come to us and live in us, and he would never leave us - so why did he remind us again and again to remain in him? Because we so easily allow ourselves to be disconnected. The Spirit of God lives within our spirits and we are to live out of our spirit being where he lives – but we so easily allow our minds or emotions to control us.

Almost everyday things happen in our lives – we can get annoyed at someone, or be hurt by something that is said, or hear news that upsets us – then we begin to think and think about those things – it is like it replays in our minds. And of course the enemy may whisper his words in our ears too. Then the joy and peace seem to wane. Has the Spirit of God left? No, but we have allowed ourselves to be disconnected. We are in a battle and it is real. Don't be discouraged if you have failed, we all have – but the wonderful thing is we can quickly reconnect! Jesus is right there.

3. I WILL DO WHATEVER YOU ASK

As we abide in Christ, there is a promise linked to that, and it is that he will do whatever we ask. Let's read:

John 15:5-8

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and my words remain in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up and thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”

This promise is also repeated at least 3 times – that he will do whatever we ask.

Just to share something I discovered as I studied this passage. In the Greek language there are several words for 'ask'. And Jesus uses both words in these wonderful chapters. One word is used for a person who is asking an equal for something – like a king to another king. And Jesus uses that word when he says he will ask the Father. But then when he says we are to ask, it is a different word – it is someone asking another who is above us. For example, like a child asking a father. We must never forget who we are speaking to.

As we remain in Jesus, as we live in the realm of the Spirit, we will speak those things that come from the heart of God – and we have the assurance that God will answer our prayer.

It's so easy to pray just from our mind, what we think God should do. Perhaps this is why some of our prayers are not answered – we are praying according to our will and not God's – but the more we learn to pray and declare what the Spirit of God prompts us to pray – the more we will see God at work.

Notice that answered prayer is linked to fruitfulness: In John 15:7-8 Jesus is speaking about prayer and then he says, "that you bear much fruit." Jesus says the same thing later in the same chapter. So there is a connection:

Remain Ask ... fruitfulness

Fruitfulness is not necessarily busyness or even productivity. Fruitfulness is what flows from the spirit within, whose source is God. That's why Jesus said, "Apart from me you can do nothing."

Key is: remain in him – and his life will flow out of us, producing fruit.

The Apostle Paul had faced persecution in his life and now is in prison. He writes to the believers in Philippi and says, "Oh to be with Christ would be so wonderful. In fact that would be better for me, but if I remain here then I have the opportunity to produce fruit".

Over the years a number of older people have said to me, 'I just want to go and be with the Lord'. We don't get to choose when that will be let's be like the Apostle Paul and long to be fruitful until that time comes. However weak our body becomes, the spirit is alive.

CONCLUSION

Jesus was leaving his disciples – he knew they would face trouble, they would be afraid – and he gives 3 wonderful promises.

1. He would come to take them to be where he was going. Although that's a wonderful promise for the future, it is also true right now – we already belong to his Father's household.
2. Then he assures them that he would be with them – not just beside them, but inside them. He was going to send His Spirit, the Counsellor to live within them.
3. And then he promised God would hear and answer their prayer.

Jesus comes to the end of his message, and before he prays for them, he reminds them again not to be troubled.

John 16:33

"In this world you will have trouble/tribulation – be of good cheer I have overcome the world."

Jesus has already conquered the evil one, he has won the victory by his death and resurrection – he has overcome. And through the power of his blood, faith in him – we too can overcome. So he says to us: "Be of good cheer, be confident, be bold – don't be afraid. I am with you."