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Scripture: John 14:1-6, 15-21

14:1 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.

14:2 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?

14:3 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.

14:4 And you know the way to the place where I am going."

14:5 Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?"

14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

14:15 "If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

14:16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever.

14:17 This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

14:18 "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.

14:19 In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live.

14:20 On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.

14:21 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."

Proclamation of the Word

Our family tradition when we are in Montreat, NC together is to hike Lookout trail. From the top of Lookout one can see the Swannanoa valley, and the little cove that is Montreat conference center where people of faith have come to worship, play, wonder, and grow in faith. From the top, pilgrims have come to watch sunrises, sunsets, and to meet God feeling just a little closer to heaven when enjoying the view from the top. I worked on summer staff in college, and on the last day of the summer, my friend Julie and I agreed that we would hike to the top as a way to end our summer together in that place. So we set our alarms for 5:30 after a late Saturday night. Sleep deprived and all we made the climb in the dark so we would be positioned for the sunrise. It was our closing worship that summer Sunday morning.

That is the first hike up lookout I remember. I don't remember getting out of breath, but as the years have gone on, my march up to the top has gotten a bit slower stopping to catch my breath along the way. I was glad when the children were small because they could be my excuse to pause! When I have hiked with my former church retreats, I would hang back with the older folks "just to be helpful" but it was I who needed to catch my breath. But there is no feeling like reaching the top of Lookout, winded and out of breath, but full.

I wonder if God ever thought how much wind and breath it would take to keep this old world going. When the wind blew over the waters of creation (Gen. 1:2) bringing life into being with its energy, did God know it would continue on perpetually? The writer of Genesis uses poetry to describe the physics of energy and wind in such a beautiful way. Even though God rests on that seventh day, God never gets out of breath....and the breath is life that keeps the world and its creatures going...

I think Jesus knew his disciples were winded and losing steam as they prepared for the inevitable, Jesus' death. So he prepares a speech of encouragement. He wants to pump them up, literally put some wind in their sails and give them courage.

I think this passage is timely. Are we not a lot like that community, exhausted by the terrors of the world and uncertain about the future? I have found myself at times avoiding the news because every day feels like an assault of some other crisis and tragedy. Now, I am not recommending keeping your head in the sand, but we can all become overwhelmed by the daily news. In the same way, the disciples were likely anxious and scared when Jesus said he would be leaving him.

Or perhaps we are just anxious in general. I hear this lots from folks living in our community- the constant building and change, the growth of our town and university, the normal tasks of life like traffic bring stress. We live in anxious times.

I remember when Avery was little and his speech had not developed he mixed up his L's and his W's. Anytime I would leave the house, he would say, "Mama, don't weave." That just broke my heart. I think we all have had times of separation anxiety. Being apart from those we love is anxiety producing. Jesus speaks to troubled hearts of his disciples who know Jesus is facing his own death on this night before his arrest. They have just finished supper, and Jesus has washed their feet to show them how to love one another. They are facing change and the loss of Jesus.

We know something about change and loss. Friends and loved ones experience dementia and Alzheimer's- that is a slow and long term loss. There are other losses like the loss of job, even retirement is a loss of routine and identity, break-up or rift in a relationship, loss of independence as we age. And young people experience loss, too. With adulthood comes responsibility. Parenting is a most wonderful calling, yet comes with new duties and limits on our lives. And obviously the death of a dear loved one brings troubled hearts.

We know something about change and loss.

Jesus promises them and us that he will never leave us. We can trust and believe that. He reminds his friends that he will be with them to the end. Even more amazing, he makes this promise knowing that they will leave him. Peter will deny Jesus three times and Judas will betray him. Like a good parent, Jesus knows they will fall short and fail sometimes. The good news for us is that God's faithfulness to us does not depend on our faithfulness. His promises are sure.

Jesus says, "Do not let your hearts be troubled, believe..." We most often hear these words spoken over the grave or at the committal of ashes, as a way to remind us that death is not the end, but a beginning. In life and in death we belong to God. But also I think in these anxious days, we need to hear those words of Jesus, don't you? "Do not let your hearts be troubled, believe..."

Trust and belief is not an emotional response or even an intellectual assent, it is a commitment of the will, and act of obedient faith. So whatever troubles your heart, have faith. Martin Luther, the Reformer, wrote about the First Commandment, Luther asks what it means to have a God. He answers that God is what you hang your heart upon.¹

We had a framed cross-stitch my mother made at home which read, "Home is where you hang your heart" which is fitting because God is our true home, the place we find rest, comfort, and peace. Jesus speaks to troubled hearts, "Hang your heart on God."

Jesus promises us the Spirit, his ongoing presence. I found myself anxious the other day, not able to get all my work done. At the end of the day, I prayed for God's guidance and direction. And a little later I heard in my head, "Rest in me...just breathe." Ah ha- receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. What a gift. That was the answer I needed. I rested and woke up with more clarity and resolve the next morning. That is the presence of the Holy Spirit.

"Rest in me...just breathe."

Some of us have a harder time with breathing than others. For me, pregnancy was the first time in my life I felt limited by my body. I could not do everything I could do before. I was used to going at a busy pace and doing anything I wanted. Then I developed sciatica, a nerve problem in my leg, and could not even walk well for a time. I found a yoga class for moms-to-be in Atlanta. It was a great way to stretch, not only my body, but to help me slow down and learn to breathe...maybe for the first time. I remember the instructor found out that I was a Seminary student at a Christian school, and she thought that odd since yoga is more eastern religious practice. But I wasn't doing yoga as a faith practice, or so I thought, but then I realized just breathing and focusing is a prayer. And the Spirit was present in a new way to me. When we experience the troubles of life, and our hearts are troubled, just breathing the breath of God and resting in the gift of Christ's Spirit is enough.

God sends the Spirit, an advocate, to come alongside us and help us in the Way of Jesus, to help us breathe the breath of life, kindness, justice, and love. Roger Nishioka, who was working with our Montreat Youth Conference planning team, would lead us in prayer. For the first moments of prayer, before any words, he would always say, "Breathe in God's mercies, breathe out God's mercies, repeat..." Breathing itself is prayer. The actions that follow, centered on Christ Jesus, will be centered on God's will.

Jesus is the way, the truth, the life. He is our Advocate. And he sends another advocate. Actually the Greek word is "paraclete"- someone who stands "para" or beside us.

So what does the Holy Spirit look like?

Well for one, the Spirit looks like Jesus. Jesus says I am sending my Spirit. And secondly, She looks like you- when you stand up for another person who needs an advocate, when you love with a fierce tenderness, when you live more like Jesus did, anytime we bear the love of Christ to one another, we look a lot like the Spirit. No wonder Jesus says, "You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you." (John 14:17) When we follow Jesus with our lives, we show the world the work of the Holy Spirit.

Take a deep breath. Breathe deeply the love of God. Now look around you. These people have the indwelling Spirit of Christ in them.

Want to be fully alive receive the Holy Spirit? Just breathe...

Breathe in God's mercy. Breathe out God's mercy. You are the hands, the feet, and the heart of Jesus on this earth.

Prayer: Breathe in God's mercy...breathe out God's mercy...Breathe on us Breath of God, fill us with life anew, that we may love what You do love, and do what You would do.ⁱⁱ

May we decrease so that Christ might increase among us. In the name of the Creator, Redeemer, and Advocate we pray, amen.

Benediction:

We may ask, "How do we find our way?" Jesus says, "I am the Way."

We ask, "What is true?" Jesus says, "I am Truth."

We ask, "Where can I find life?" Jesus says, "I am Life."

We have a guide and an Advocate. Jesus sends us forth, but we are never alone.

Remember, by the Love of God you were born, by the grace of our Lord Jesus, you have been redeemed, and power the power of the Holy Spirit, you will be given all you need for living faithfully.

ⁱ See Paul Lehmann's discussion in *The Decalogue and a Human Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

ⁱⁱ "Breathe on Me, Breath of God" from the *Glory to God* hymnal.