

## Fifth Week of Easter Homily, 2020

**Acts 6:1-7; Psalm 33; I Peter 2:4-9; John 14:1-12**

I will never forget when I was in college driving on I 90 from Spokane to Seattle. I was driving to Seattle to catch a plane to go to my brother's college graduation in California. About half way, I started entering into some fog. Initially I slowed down, but I kept driving because I had a reference point. I could see the yellow lines on the road. Eventually the fog was so thick that I could no longer see the lines. I pulled off to the side of the road and stepped out of the car. I had never been in such dense fog. I literally could not see two feet in front of me. It was completely disorienting. I needed a point of reference. Finally the fog lifted enough to continue the journey.

A similar experience happened a few weeks ago. I was driving our boat from Horse Island to Auke Bay. It was a beautiful sunny morning around Horse and Colt Islands. However, when I came around the north end of Colt Island and looked toward Auke Bay, there was a heavy fog bank that started at Coghlan Island, about 1.5 miles from the harbor. I was in pure sunshine, but I would soon enter dense fog. Once in the fog, I started to slow down. The heavy fog covered the whole bay. Have you ever driven a boat in dense fog? It is not easy. There are no yellow lines to help guide you. Even with my G.P.S. (Global Positioning System) that displayed my old track lines which revealed where I had driven many times before, it was nearly impossible to drive straight to Auke Bay harbor. All my track lines led there, but once in the fog, it was very difficult to follow. It is a bit unnerving to be surrounded by such fog. Without a reference point, you have little idea where you are going. I finally made it to Auke Bay, but it took much longer than usual and my track line looked like an "S" instead of a straight line. What I needed was a reference point.

I mention these stories because the context of our Gospel reading is a time when the disciples are entering into some fog. Their lives are about to become disoriented.

We are Easter people in the Easter season called to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. Yet, the Church invites us this morning to go back to the last night Jesus spent with his disciples before his arrest.

The context of the Gospel is the upper room. At first the mood is joyful. The disciples are celebrating the Passover with Jesus. During the Passover, Jesus inaugurates the first Eucharist as he lifts up the bread and says, "This is my body" and as he held up the cup and said, "This is my blood, the blood of the New Covenant." After supper Jesus took off his outer garment and washed the disciples' feet giving them an example to follow, the master being their servant. You wonder if they are sensing change is in the air. Jesus then gives them a new commandment, "love one another as I have loved you."

The mood began to shift and the fog began to settle when Jesus shared with the disciples that one of them would betray him. Moreover, Jesus told them that he must go away and they could not follow. You can sense the fog thickening over the disciples. Peter said, "Master, I will follow you anywhere." But Jesus said to Peter, "Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times." The fog is dense. What are they going to do? Jesus had been their reference point for three years. They were in storms that Jesus calmed. They had questions that Jesus answered. Now what?

We can understand the shift in mood. Confusion has filled the air. Jesus was going away and they could not follow, one of the disciples would betray him and the leader of the disciples, Peter, would deny him.

It is to this context, this struggle, this fog of uncertainty, sadness, fear and disorientation that Jesus speaks these grace filled words, "Do not let your hearts be troubled." These words speak to every time and place to every person 2,000 years ago to today. "Do not let your hearts be troubled."

We are experiencing a time in our world, our nation and our community where the fog has settled. The fog is more dense in some communities than in others, but it is still disorienting and confusing. The pandemic, Covid-19, is like a fog bank. It's hard to find our way. We are not sure what the truth is or how to make our way through the dense fog. At times it seems like the fog is lifting but at other times it seems thicker than ever. It is to our own foggy, uncertain, disorienting, Covid-19 existence that Jesus speaks these words of grace to us, "Do not let your hearts be troubled."

This is not the only time Jesus speaks these grace filled words. Twice in John chapter 14 Jesus says, "Do not let your hearts be troubled." Near the end of chapter 14, Jesus tells the disciples that he will not leave them orphaned, but will give them the Holy Spirit. Then he says, "Peace I give to you, my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives, do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."

Whose heart or mind hasn't been troubled? Whose life hasn't lacked peace or vision? It seems that a troubled heart is part of the fabric of human life, the human condition. Again, it is into the fog banks of our troubled lives that twice, Jesus speaks these tender, powerful words of grace, "Do not let your hearts be troubled."

In our Gospel lesson Jesus goes on, "You believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so would I have told you that I go and prepare a place for you so that if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to myself so that where I am you may be also."

Jesus invites us in the struggles, uncertainties, foggy, disorienting times of our lives to keep our eyes on heaven. Make heaven a reference point. Jesus is preparing a place for us. "In my father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you." Keep your eyes on heaven and eternity. When the fog is dense and you cannot see very far, keep your eyes on your eternal home.

It has been said, "some people are so heavenly minded they are no earthly good." I do not believe that. Those who are truly heavenly minded do the most good on earth.

C.S. Lewis said it this way, "If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were precisely those who thought most of the next. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this."

To help find our way in the fog and the storms of life, we are called to keep our eyes on heaven. Let heaven, our eternal home, be one of our primary reference points.

Today is Mother's Day. Happy Mother's Day to all mothers. I learned some things from my mother that have helped me think of heaven, God's home. My mother loved to entertain and have people over. Whenever we entertained we not only cleaned the house, but we would also make each person a name

plate. Every guest had a name plate with their name on it and it was placed where they were going to sit. Thus, when they came into our house, they knew that they were thought of before they ever came into our house and that there was a place for them. They mattered.

Friends, Jesus is preparing a place for us. God has written our names in his heart. We matter to God. You matter to God. There is a place for you. This truth gives us encouragement and hope in the foggy and difficult times of our lives. Keep your eyes on heaven.

Yet, there is more. Jesus goes on to say, "And you know the way where I am going." Thomas said to him, "We do not know where you are going, how can we know the way." Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

"I am the way." Jesus is saying, You know me, Thomas, you have been with me three years. I am the way. I am the truth. I am the life. The ultimate point of reference we need in our lives is Jesus Christ:

The Way is not a path it is a person.

The Truth is not a dogma it is a person.

The Life is not something we grasp at, it is a person, Jesus Christ.

Jesus is our reference point in heaven and on earth. We need Jesus to guide us, encourage us and to lead us home. He promises us he will not leave us orphans. He will give us the Holy Spirit to be with us always. The Holy Spirit will point us to Jesus.

Thus, in this foggy, uncertain time we are called to keep our eyes on heaven and on Jesus. We are invited to come to Jesus, to fall in love with Jesus, to make Jesus our true reference point and put our trust in him.

When you think about the reference points of your lives, what helps you get through difficult times? I invite you to think about heaven, your eternal home. But even more, we are invited to contemplate Jesus. Seek to know, follow and fall in love with Jesus. He is our true reference point. He is for you, He is with you, and he understands all your questions and struggles. When the sun is clear and the fog is dense, Jesus is with us.

Peter says in our second reading. "Come to Jesus, a living stone." A point of reference needs to be solid, unchanging. Otherwise, it is easy to be deceived, misguided or lost. Jesus is the same, yesterday, today and forever. Jesus is our living stone, our solid and eternal reference point.

Peter goes on to say, "And like living stones let yourselves be built in to a spiritual house." Since Jesus is our true reference point, we too are called to be reference points for others. As living stones, we can help point people to Jesus and be vessels of hope, peace and grace in the foggy times of life.

Today, as we celebrate mothers. Let us thank God for how they have been reference points for us - how they have guided us and helped shape us and have pointed us in good and right directions. In many ways, I am a Christian seeking to love Jesus because my mother, a living stone herself, helped point me to Jesus.

My friends, no matter how long the fog remains, we will get through this. May we keep our eyes on heaven and look to Jesus our true, gracious and eternal reference point. Hear again these grace filled words, "Do not let your hearts be troubled."

I will pray for you and ask that you pray for me.

The Lord bless you in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Deacon Steve