



May 26, 2019

Jesus Offers Comfort and Courage for Troubled Hearts
Pastor Vern Christopherson

John 14:23-29 NRSV

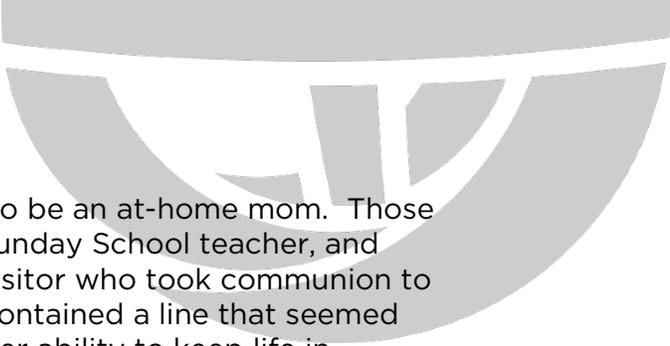
²³Jesus answered him, "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. ²⁴Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.

²⁵"I have said these things to you while I am still with you. ²⁶But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. ²⁷Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. ²⁸You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I am coming to you.' If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. ²⁹And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe."

Dorothy Carlson died this past March. Dorothy and her husband Marv were members of Zumbro for over 60 years. Then Marv died in 2012. And Dorothy moved to Alexandria to be closer to family.

I read Dorothy's obituary in the Post Bulletin shortly after she died. I learned a lot about her. After college, Dorothy taught at country schools in Goodhue County. She was married to Gordon Lindholm in December of 1943. Shortly after that, Gordon was sent to Europe to serve in WW II. He was an airman in the Army Air Corp. Four months later, in April of 1944, tragedy struck. Gordon's plane was shot down over Yugoslavia and he was killed. The following September, Dorothy - newly widowed - gave birth to a baby girl. She named her Lois. Somehow, in the face of overwhelming grief, Dorothy found the strength to go on. She continued teaching in country schools and raising little Lois.

Six years later, Dorothy got a second chance at love. She married Marvin Carlson. They made their home in Rochester. They joined Zumbro. Dorothy gave birth to



another little girl: Debra. She retired from teaching to be an at-home mom. Those were busy years. Dorothy was Girl Scout leader, a Sunday School teacher, and then in her mid to late 80s, she became a Friendly Visitor who took communion to some of Zumbro's homebound folks. The obituary contained a line that seemed especially fitting: "Dorothy will be remembered for her ability to keep life in perspective."

On the night before his death, Jesus and his disciples are gathered in the upper room. That's the setting for today's scripture reading. They've just celebrated the Passover meal. And Jesus has finished washing their feet. What Jesus has been hinting to his followers for several months now - that he would die - is finally coming into focus. It's no longer just a strange and confusing rumor - it's real and it's imminent. We're about to find out if the disciples will be able to keep life in perspective.

We know some things about those disciples. They're a ragtag bunch who left everything to follow Jesus. They were fishermen and tax collectors and carpenters, and now they are followers. But now, the one they've trusted to fulfill all their hopes - is leaving them. They're worried they're going to be lost without him.

All too often, it seems, this is what happens in our world: we find ourselves left alone. This is what Zumbro members Sam Hilleshiem and his children, Rena and Luke, experienced this past week. Sam kissed his wife Jill goodbye on Monday morning. Jill dropped the kids off at John Marshall. She drove to her job as a special ed teacher at Gibbs Elementary. Jill sat down at her desk to get ready for the day. Within a matter of minutes, she suffered a massive heart attack and died. She was 52 years old. The funeral was Friday. Sam, Rena, and Luke had to say goodbye to Jill. I wonder if they were worried that they'd be lost without her.

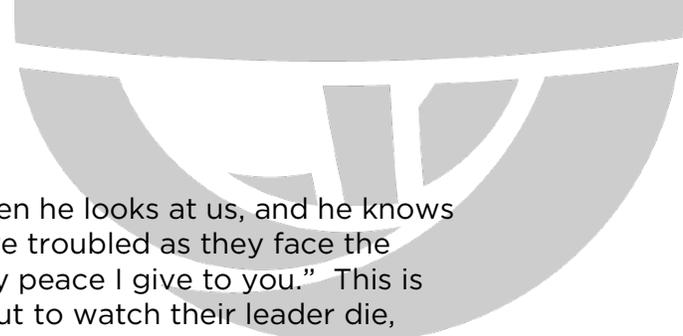
Living in the world that we do, like the Hilleshiems, like those early disciples, we can face unimaginable trauma and loss. In the midst of it, Jesus says: "I do not give as the world gives." What's he telling us?

Sometimes the world gives beauty: a full moon on a starry night, the feeling of someone who extends a warm hand, a strong cup of coffee as the day begins. Yes, the world can give beauty.

But so often, it seems, the world gives trouble. It gives disappointment. It gives the slow ache of depression. It gives us the grief of seeing those we love slip away into addiction or dementia or death.

The Message paraphrase of the Bible puts Jesus' words like this: "I don't leave you the way you're used to being left - feeling abandoned and bereft." Too often this world, with all its fragile beauty, leaves us feeling like the floor has fallen out from under us. We're heartbroken and alone.





Please hear me: Jesus knows what we're feeling when he looks at us, and he knows what his disciples are feeling too. He knows they are troubled as they face the world. And yet he says, "Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you." This is really rather amazing. To a room full of people about to watch their leader die, "peace" must sound like the strangest word in the world. What on earth does it mean?

I think Jesus' peace means at least a couple of things. First, Jesus is promising *comfort*. As they face the prospect of being left alone, Jesus says that they won't be *all* alone. No, he will send the Holy Spirit to remind them of his words and to help them be a family for each other.

The Hilleshiems met with Pastor Shelley on Wednesday afternoon to plan the funeral. The met in the Lounge. Afterwards, they were standing in the hall and getting ready to leave. Sam made a point to come into the main office where I was preparing a few things for Wednesday worship. He gave me a big hug. And he said: "This church has been like a family to us. That's why we're here. From this day on, we will need it to be even more of a family for us."

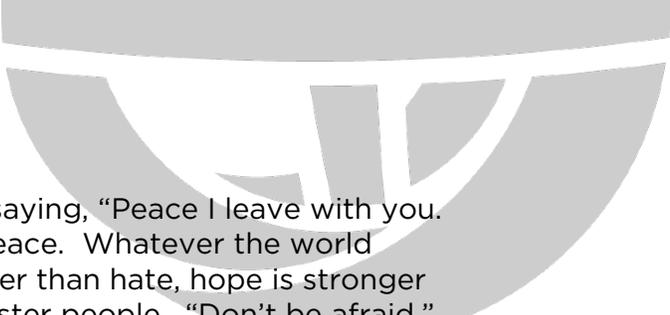
When we're left alone and our hearts are ready to break, Jesus assures us that we will have peace. A part of that peace is comfort. Earlier in the evening, Jesus said to his disciples: "Don't let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? 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."

To be honest, these words might have been more comforting for the disciples *after* Easter than *before*. And they might have been more comforting for Dorothy Carlson at age 96 than for Jill Hilleshiem at age 52. But Jesus shares them with us anyway. It's part of his peace. He wants to help us keep life in perspective.

A second thing Jesus promises his followers is courage. In the face of overwhelming trouble, Jesus reassures them. "You won't be alone. I will send my Spirit." We often translate Jesus' words as "take heart," which is beautiful and poetic, but his words can also be translated as "have courage." Jesus knows that in the months to come, his followers will have plenty of heartache and fear and struggle. And yet, because Jesus is establishing peace in our world, his followers can have courage. He offers us peace, not so we can find shelter *from* the world, but rather so we might enter more deeply *into* the world. He wants us to live fully and boldly as his Easter people.

Keep in mind, Jesus is saying these things on the way to the cross. His disciples probably have more questions than answers: *Can we welcome the stranger? Will we be able to love even those who are difficult to love? Will we listen for the Holy Spirit and dare to follow?*





“When everything around us is crumbling,” Jesus is saying, “Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you.” Jesus is offering us deep peace. Whatever the world throws at us, we can be confident that love is stronger than hate, hope is stronger than fear, light is stronger than darkness. We are Easter people. “Don’t be afraid,” Jesus whispers in our ear, “Live more fully into this world. Have courage.” Jesus wants to help us keep life in perspective.

We heard some of this perspective from fifteen-year-old Luke Hilleshiem last Friday. Luke shared a remembrance at his mother’s funeral. In front of hundreds of people, this is what he said: “I want to tell you about the most wonderful woman in my life, my mom, Jill Hilleshiem. She was always there to support me, and whenever I wanted to quit, she wouldn’t let me. You never really appreciate someone until they’re gone, and words will never be able to express just how much I miss her and love her. I never realized how much I needed her until she left. But she taught me to always be the best version of myself, and that’s what I plan to do. She was my biggest fan and I’m so glad she’s my mom because I know she will continue to be with me.”

These are some wonderful words from Luke. I hear echoes of Jesus’ words to his disciples: “Peace I leave with you.” I hear echoes of Jesus’ comfort and courage for troubled hearts. I hear a resolve that, no matter what this world throws at us, we won’t be completely alone. The Spirit of the Risen Christ will be with us. And he’ll be asking us to be a family for each other.

Friends, we are an Easter people. Because the tomb is empty, we dare to believe that love is stronger than hate, hope is stronger than fear, light is stronger than darkness. We are called not to run from this world, but to live more fully into it.

As we do, we live more fully and boldly as followers of Jesus. And we do our best to keep life in perspective. Amen.

