

May 10, 2020 **'I Wanted a Perfect Ending'** (*John 14:1-14*) Rev. Jane Courtright

It sometimes feels as though just in a moment, everything changed! A new virus invaded our peace, our plans, and our security. In a heartbeat, our language and life structure were upended. Now, even young children know the phrases 'social distancing,' 'quarantine,' and 'Covid-1.' Even if parts of our country and the world are 'reopening,' most of us are still hunkered down at home, and may be for some time yet. This strange time introduces a level of fear that most of us haven't seen since '9/11.' Fear of what may come. Fear of touching. Fear of exposure. Fear of what we can't see.

The words of Jesus shared a moment ago are part of an exquisitely beautiful good bye from a teacher and friend who is wrapping things up, in a sense. Jesus' good bye includes reminders, coaching and reassurance to his followers.

Jesus loves deeply these followers of his, but he also knows that they are weak, and not always able to see or trust the future. And Jesus also senses, somehow, that he doesn't have a long time to be with them. What Jesus is trying to tell them, he is of course, also telling us today!

This good bye took place on a very emotion-filled evening. Jesus and the disciples had shared Passover Supper together, their last supper. He had even done the very puzzling ritual of washing THEIR feet!

These things confused the disciples. All the undercurrents of the evening brought up fear and anxiety. The disciples tried hard to make sense of it all! We find ourselves confused, afraid, anxious at our new experiences in this Covid-19 time. We try to make sense of it all, when even scientists and government officials cannot make total sense of this virus or how to go into the future.

So, Jesus reassures his disciples with words full of love and care and promise. Do Jesus words have anything to say to US during this pandemic season? Listen to two promises of Jesus in this passage:

FIRST: I am going to prepare a place for you, for all eternity.
Trust God. Trust me – that IS what I am going to do for you!

SECOND: When the time is right, I will come again and take you there with me.

We have so many questions ourselves about this virus and how to proceed. Thomas also had questions for Jesus: ‘Lord, we **don’t** know where you are going, so how will we get there? Is heaven beyond the Milky Way? Or some other galaxy? We have **no** idea where heaven is or how to get there! Where will we end up?’

Jesus calmly and simply repeats, ‘Thomas, trust me. I am going to get a place ready for you, and when the time is **right**, I’ll come and get you and take you there!’

Like us, his followers in this Covid-19 time, Jesus knew that they had no way of knowing or understanding what the next step in their journeys would be. No doubt it was impossible for Jesus to describe it to them. And so, Jesus, as he often did, used images and language that they **could** understand. They understood the image of house and dwelling place.

The passage reads: “In my father’s house, there are many dwelling places. The words house or dwelling place are translated from the word ‘**Monal**.’ It actually means a resting place for a traveler. It would have brought to mind caravans of camels and travelers. In Jesus’ time, there would be people who would go ahead of the caravan to prepare a place. When the caravan arrived there, the camp

would have been prepared, water found and food cooked. It would be a place of comfort to spend the night.

Those disciples could also grasp the idea of someone showing them the way, staying with them on their journey. Jesus knew that if they were to look the future straight in the eye without doubts and fears, they just **had** to trust. There was no better way he could explain it to them.

It reminds me of the story of the Underground Railroad. Without knowing who to trust to help them read the non-traditional signs along their way, the slaves would not be able to make their way through to freedom! They learned to follow the stars, to use passwords and to read the handmade quilts that helpers hung on their fences and houses.

For example, in most quilts, the center squares were colored **red** to symbolize hearth and home. But if the center of the quilt was **blue**, it meant **that** home hides, takes care of, and sends on runaway slaves! Those runaways used such maps and guides, but more importantly, on each step of their journey, they had to have great trust to find their way to freedom.

Jesus also assures his followers that by trusting in God, trusting in Jesus, we also can find our way! What are some of the non-traditional signs you see along our way through this Coronavirus time? *[silence]*

If we are honest, there is pain along the way: there is loneliness, worry, illness, death, unkind words and actions, and more! Jesus' departure was also very painful. Jesus would leave the disciples for a time and this would cause pain; but also lead to togetherness later, to communion. You and I also look forward to being physically together as family, friends, church family, after this Pandemic season.

“Trust me. Trust God,” Jesus assured them. Jesus say this to us as well, his disciples of today. We may fear the future. Our future will surely be in many ways, different than we can imagine. Our world, our lives, will change in ways we can’t exactly predict. But we are also assured that God is with us on every step of this Coronavirus journey.

Our lives, this path, will not be always be smooth. We cannot know precisely what will happen. A trust that is so deep that it becomes a part of our very being, a trust in God’s promises, will keep us traveling forward.

Today is a day ‘chock’ full of goodbyes, wonderings and new beginnings! Those first disciples will soon not have Jesus physically with them. They are on the brink of a new, promising beginning; though they couldn’t imagine that on that long ago evening. You and I are also cut off from hugging our loved ones, from their physical presence. This causes us pain, but we can look forward to being together as community and family, whenever that will be in the future. You and I, as individuals, as families, as a church community, and as followers of Jesus, we will be changed as well!

In this Coronavirus time, during this Easter Season and **always**, let us proclaim: “Hope and love are alive. We are not totally lost on this journey. How can we be lost, when God travels with us? New life beckons!

In closing, I offer you some famous quotes:

From the movie ‘**Annie**:’ “How lucky I am to have something that makes saying goodbye [being separated from] so hard.”

From **Ivy Baker Priest**: “The world is round and the place which may seem like the end may also be the beginning.”

Words from the late **Gilda Radner**: “I wanted a perfect ending. Now, I’ve learned, the hard way, that some poems don’t rhyme, and some stories don’t have a clear beginning, middle and end. Life is about not knowing, having to change, taking the moment and making the best of it, without knowing what’s going to happen next.”

From **Jesus** in John 14:1: “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.”

And words from **Star Wars**: “MAY THE FORCE [*of good, of God*] BE WITH YOU!

Amen.