

Address by Belinda Speed-Andrews

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In the name of God, Father, Son & Holy Spirit. Amen.

Wow! What an amazing Gospel reading. I guess it is a familiar reading from John's gospel for many of us in church life as it is one of the readings that families and friends choose when organising a funeral for a loved one. It also contains one of the most controversial phrases in the Bible and has been the cause of much discord: 'I am the way, and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me'. However, it was the very first verse, 'Do not let your hearts be troubled' that caught my attention, possibly because of where we all are at the moment; in the middle of a pandemic not allowed out of our homes, only to shop for necessities and an hours exercise a day in whatever shape or form that may take.

This whole section , chapters 14-16 are part of Jesus' farewell discourse and contains for me some of the most beautiful verses in the gospels. Jesus has just told his friends the disciples over an intimate meal where he washes their feet, that one of them will betray him, that he, Jesus will only be with them a little while longer and when Peter asks Jesus where he is going, Jesus tells him that where he is going Peter cannot follow. This is the man, your best friend with whom you have just spent the last 3 years. You have watched him heal, cast out evil spirits, raise his best friend from the dead, confront the Pharisees, not a sensible move unless you are Jesus, and now he says I'm going away and you can't come. And to top it all he announces to Peter that he will betray Jesus. How then can their hearts not be troubled? If that was me I would be beside myself with worry, with unanswered questions, fearful for the future. Troubled, of course I'm troubled.

So what about us. We are perhaps troubled too, troubled by the current situation. We are in a liminal space, a space between what was and what is to come. It's like a doorway between two rooms. We know one intimately, we know all it's secrets, it's joys & heartaches, the could have been but we don't know what the new room has to offer. For some people they have no job to go back to; for others they are scared what will happen if they step out into the big

wide world and for us in Church what is it going to look like? Don't let your hearts be troubled. Troubled, of course I'm troubled. We need a companion to help us navigate this possible loss of the familiar and walk with us as we move forward into what we don't know.

Well that was a bit of doom and gloom, but actually it's just getting the facts out there. Bear with me though because perhaps Jesus is right, don't let your hearts be troubled. This phrase is not a sentimental, ah there don't worry all will be well. It's more like a pep talk from your football coach during half time when the score is 2-1 against. It's your teacher motivating her students as they approach their exams it's a rallying cry in the face of adversity. So what will free the troubled heart of the disciples? What will free our troubled hearts? The world peddles many things supposedly to soothe our troubled hearts and perhaps we are hoping for answers to all our questions from the government about how we eventually exit lockdown safely. But Jesus has only one answer; 'Believe in God, believe also in me'.

We are still in Easter, a period of great joy and more than anything hope because we know in Jesus' sacrifice for us on the cross we can and will still be with God. And I want to argue that in spite of all the doom and gloom that the media peddle every day there is hope all around us, to strengthen and encourage us as we move through that doorway into a new room, a room prepared by Jesus for you and for me, for all people.

Both Thomas & Philip are still struggling to really understand what Jesus is talking about and maybe there are some of you listening to this who are struggling right now and can resonate with Philip's plea, 'Lord show us the Father and we will be satisfied'. I feel for Thomas & Philip struggling to get to grips with everything that is happening around them; a sense of fear and abandonment. Don't we feel this and many other feelings that trouble us? But Jesus doesn't give up and he goes on to tell them to just trust in God, trust in Him. He also implicitly tells them to trust in themselves & in the relationship that they have built with Jesus over the last 3 years. He says 'You do know the way; I am the way & you know me you know the Father. Trust yourself to know what you know; keep doing what you have been doing & if it is still too hard "believe me because of the works themselves"'

If you are finding it hard to trust in God in all that is going on around you at the moment, if you feel like you are clinging on to the hem of Jesus' robe by your finger tips, take a look at what's going on around us in our community in our church families, locally and nationally. Communities have come together in way not seen since the end of WWII. People now know who their neighbours are and who is vulnerable and who is lonely. Groups of people have come together to cook on a large scale to feed our courageous workers in the NHS and people who work in retail, drive lorries, deliver goods, collect the rubbish are now no longer the rejected they are the celebrated; 8 weeks ago this was not the case. The homeless are safe in doors and are warm and fed and possibly the healthiest they have been for years and the most wonderful thing is, the world is now breathing again. This is Easter, this is resurrection this is God with us. Let us use the best from the old room but let us move forward into the new room full of hope, full of courage and know that goodness and mercy surely will follow us all the days of our lives. Am I troubled? No, are you?