

Be Courageous | John 14:1-14; 1 Peter 2:2-10 | LUMC | May 7, 2023

By Rev Grace Kanake

Dear Church family and friends: Last week we heard from Jesus establishing himself as our best leader. He is the only leader who can guard us 24 hours a day providing strength, security, and support. Jesus knows each of us by name. He provides for all our needs. Despite being God, Jesus humbled himself all the way to the cross to save us.

Today John gives us another flashback when Jesus held a council with the disciples to reassure them of His physical presence, and spiritual, emotional, and moral support. Jesus did this before his death. Jesus poured into the disciples a new breath of courage saying, “I have overcome the world, you too need to overcome agony and fear of death. Do not waver. You know I am the way, the truth, and the life. Be prayerful. Whatever you ask in my name, God shall do it.” Jesus is saying that death will not deprive him of Godly qualities or change him from who he is; he remains our savior.

Why did Jesus’ call his disciples to courage? Why did Jesus address the disciples’ fear? Jesus had been with the disciples for three years and he had not seen them as fearful as they were at hearing he would leave! Jesus was not addressing natural fear or a beneficial feeling like a reverential fear of God, but a terror—an awful feeling that devastates and paralyzes its victim. Jesus knew the Pharisees were about to outlaw his ministry, bring believers to courts, condemn the believers, put them to jail and even kill others. This is why Jesus encouraged the disciples to be prayerful, be in fellowship and preach without allowing excessive fear to paralyze their minds and brains.

In this reading Jesus’ goal is to equip the disciples with a great and deep faith that will carry them through the coming trying times. To call and maintain the disciples’ courage Jesus offered them a catalogue or “to-do” list so they were always focusing on being holy. This list helped them from being overrun with fear: and one of the top-to-do categories was to believe in God and in Jesus. Believing the Triune God erases fear and creates a positive hope for being with God now and in eternity.

Jesus is also reminding his believers that he will come again and take them where he will be—in the everlasting, eternal bliss. We continue to believe eternity is real because Jesus taught us and encouraged the first believers and those who will believe in him to join him in eternity. One quality of being an eternity candidate is to love God and love one another “as we are loved.” Jesus is the epitome of love by his going all the way to the cross. In the modern world people ought to balance loving God and one another and forgo the new dictum toward a new ‘loving concept’ of, saying, “Man for himself, God for us all.”

As stated, when fear paralyzes the mind; it entertains forgetfulness. This happened to some disciples like Thomas. When Thomas heard Jesus saying he was going away, fear set in, Thomas began to anticipate some loneliness and fear took hold. He wanted to know how to get to the earthly place Jesus was journeying to. However, Jesus was talking figuratively, but it terrified Thomas. An outspoken and quick thinker

wanted to lead other disciples to visit Jesus at an earthly place. It's easy to confuse figurative language with spiritual interpretation. Jesus was referring to eternity.

Jesus reminded Thomas that he was the only Way to God. When Jesus became the Way, it meant more than religious adherence, more than the religious rubrics or fanaticism. It is knowing the truth and letting the truth lead into Godliness as we fulfil religious customs. Jesus wants a spiritual exercise that goes into the heart of the matter.

Coming close home, the reading also speaks to our coming separation. You are aware I have two more months to be your pastor. During this time, you and I have reason to entertain fear because we have been together for the last three years just as Jesus and his disciples had been. In the last three years we leaned on each other, we joined in worship online or in person. We no doubt failed God in some ways, or failed each other. Yet we are a congregation alive, breathing and kicking. We have survived Covid, we have survived and entered another phase of life, we have read the Bible together, we have held fellowships, we have held Christian events together. For everything Christian and everything spiritual we have done, we praise God.

During these two months we continue to be together, let us acknowledge our sins and repent, let us grieve the anticipated separation. Let us not be in excessive fear but beneficial fear though there will be physical, emotional, and to some extent spiritual separation. We are part of a human species who are comfortable with what we know and fearful of what we do not know.

We are obviously fearful because things we have enjoyed together are going to cease, and anticipated dreams may cease. No doubt we have come a long way. When I came, Covid was at it's peak. We could not hug or share a meal. Physical contact was not allowed. I am leaving when life is starting to look like the life we knew before Covid. We can now hug. We can use hymn books and partake in Holy Communion in these pews! Yes, we are doing Bible study and coffee hour, holding regular meetings without keeping six feet apart, and wearing no masks unless voluntarily. We have come a long way.

I have witnessed most members getting actively involved in worship and in leadership. In 2020 it was not easy to get a worship leader. I would have approach two to three members to find one. To get a prayer session leader was and to some extent, remains a hustle. I have also seen an addition of new members and an improved financial status compared to 2020. While these are among our successes, we have our share of loss as well.

Let us acknowledge the loss of members by death and voluntary withdrawal, some leadership tensions, unpleasant racial bias, prideful comments that hurt others, and loss of jobs and more. In our losses as in our gainful fear, let us allow God to continue doing a good thing!

So, like the ancient disciples, may we trust that God will keep us safe, answering all our prayers. *Let us get excited!* God is surely ushering us into the new beginnings of the Methodist and Christian calendars. You will have a new pastor. Rev Cindy is great! I will have a new congregation; they are lovely people. May we open ourselves to God

and allow God to take us into the new ventures before us. Let us shun fear and enter the new phase of our Christian faith acknowledging our loss and accepting successes with gratitude to God. We owe God praise for these three years of Christian service. In all successful events we undertake in the next phase of our calling, may we give praise to God and not to ourselves.

Jesus encourages believers to keep open communication with God through a deep, prayerful life. Jesus assures us that whatever we pray in his name, the Triune God will answer. So, being physically absent does not mean Jesus is spiritually absent. The lack of physical presence does not deter communication or getting the help we need. When we are in fellowship with God, whatever we ask will be given and whatever we bind on earth shall be bound in heaven (sounds scary? maybe so!) because 'God is not a man to lie.' Let us always remember we are set apart from who we were before accepting God in Christ to live in our lives.

In this second to last of my sermons, I wish you to always remember St Peter's words, "But you are A CHOSEN PEOPLE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE OF GOD'S OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellences of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."

May God bless you; may God shine His face upon you and give you peace.
Amen.