

What Does It Mean?

We subscribe to Netflix in our house because my better half has a sincere disdain for advertisements during television shows. As a result, we have encountered many different types of television shows, from movies to half-hour comedies, *The West Wing* (even 20 years after it went off the air), as well as other shows. One that we keep coming back to is “The Great British Baking Show.” In this series, “regular” people with a talent for baking are put up against each other in a “signature challenge”, a “technical challenge”, and a “showstopper.” Contestants are eliminated each week until there is a winner who receives the coveted “Cake Platter” as a symbol of their win.

I am in awe of the talents of these non-professional bakers. The only two things that I have ever baked from scratch were Nestle’s Toll House cookies and Cheesecake. To this day, I think I could still make the cookies without the recipe. But these people do far more than make chocolate chip (did you know you can use different chip flavors?) cookies. They use terms and bake things I’ve never heard of, let alone tried to bake. Have you ever heard that you were supposed to fold

something into something else? I have absolutely no idea what that means. My number one question that comes up during the show is, “What does this mean?”

I have a sneaky suspicion that the disciples may have asked the same thing when Jesus first told them about being “the way, the truth, and the life” or “Do not let your hearts be troubled.” The reading from today’s Gospel comes to us as part of something Scripture scholars call “the Last Supper Discourses.” These are Jesus’ parting teachings to his disciples the night before his crucifixion. Usually covered in Chapters 13-17 in John, they offer assurance, instruction, and preparation. In this particular section, he is offering the assurance to “not let their hearts be troubled.”

The disciples had little to no idea of what was going to happen to Jesus in the next eighteen hours. They could not foresee his arrest by the temple guards, his “trial” before the Sanhedrin, his transfer to Pontius Pilate, his subsequent visit to Herod (only found in Luke’s Gospel, by the way...), and then the sentencing by Pilate at the request of the crowd. We’ve mentioned on many occasions how the disciples were

horrified by all of this and could only think that they were next, let alone that someone they had grown to love was executed before their very eyes. In light of all of this, how could the disciples had known what Jesus meant by “Do not let your hearts be troubled.”

Jesus follows this with the instruction that “I am the way, the truth, and the life” as well as to go to the Father. Phillip finally questions him to get further clarification. You see, Phillip has also basically asked, “What does this mean?”

How many times in our life have we been faced with something and have asked the same question, “What does this mean?” We ask this, perhaps, with a diagnosis, a job change, when someone dies, a baby is born, or when something else happens to change our lives. This question arises when we are faced with the reality of decisions that have been made for us. This forces us to amend the way in which we live in order to survive.

We often turn to God and ask, “What does this mean?” Knowing that his disciples would do the same, he tries to give them some answers in advance. In doing so, Jesus also gives us some answers in advance to

offer us guidance. But, much like the bakers on the Great British Baking Show, sometimes we need some help in figuring out how to do what is asked of us. This is a competition show where they still offer to help their “opponents” and maybe hinder their place in the competition.

As Christians living in the 21st century, we are called upon to do what we can to bring about the Kingdom or Reign of God here on earth. As we have seen in various facets, there are differences of opinion in how we should do that. It seems that if we continue to live out the Gospel message, we will be able to continue the good work we have started in our churches to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick and imprisoned, welcome the stranger, and love our neighbors—even our enemies—as ourselves. We are called not to let our hearts be troubled in these times. We are called to recognize Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life as we seek to build on our relationships with God. We are also called to help one another, to be there for our siblings in Christ.

The journey and relationship with God is not a competition; no one is being voted off, and there are rewards for all who seek to participate. “Do not let your hearts be troubled;” let us all strive to make Jesus “the

way, the truth, and the life” for us, our siblings in Christ, and in the Kingdom or Reign of God on earth, even if in the greater Westfield and Southwick area. Amen!