



5/17/2020

“Living Through Uncertainty with Assurance”

Scripture: John 14:15-21

Sixth Sunday of Easter

Festival of the Christian Home

Theme: Jesus assures us, as he did his first followers, that we are never really alone or without what is needed most at any time, no matter how uncertain our future seems.

Whether we are dealing with isolation, additional stress from being together at home so much or uncertainty about the future, we can turn to God’s word for peace, wisdom and strength. Christians can rejoice that God was with us in human form as Jesus the Christ. And before leaving his disciples by death, and later his ascension into heaven, Jesus promised them that they would not be without God’s presence if they continued to love him by following his way.

Jesus said (John 14:15-21 NRSV),

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate (or Comforter, Counselor, Helper, etc.), to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he lives with you, and he will be in you.

“I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.

“They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”

As we continue this month with our focus on fostering family faith and worship life in these most unusual days, let’s see where God is in all of this, especially as it applies to our personal and family lives.

For me, this past week has been one of mixed times of at-home worship and adult bible studies, prayer, calls to some of our homebound members and others, as well as ZOOM clergy meetings with worship and reading more information about processes for reopening churches. I even went to church one day to get some things done there and spend a few minutes in the sanctuary. And, of course, I spent some time planning and preparing for worship today.

And I have to confess, that when I went grocery shopping with Karen on Friday, I was somewhat tired of breathing with a facemask on and people not following the arrows on the isles to keep social distancing. I was tempted to say something or give a look to someone. But, thankfully the Holy Spirit told me otherwise, and an announcement came over the PA system reminding folks. And after spending a long time up and down many isles, I was tempted to go the wrong way to grab a needed item I saw rather than go around and come down the aisle. I just left my loaded



cart and make the trip; thankful I could get what I needed.

But as I thought about what to preach on today, I really was not sure, even until yesterday morning. As I thought about all that is happening around us and with us in our country, our world, and even within our congregation, I wondered and prayed about what to say next. I had considered today's lectionary (assigned) scripture readings earlier in the week, including the passage from John just read. I also considered what I have already said in the past couple of months. I pondered and prayed over what I heard, read and experienced throughout the week, those feelings shared with me by others, as well as my own.

Several ideas came to mind for a message, but no one theme stood out. Well, as you know, Friday was considerably warmer than it has been in this unusually cool spring. So, I left some windows open that night. Then yesterday morning, as I sat at the desk and looked out my home study/office window, I enjoyed the refreshing cooler air. Then I noticed that after rains had fallen some time during the night, many of the beautiful pink and white azalea blossoms just a few feet away from the window had turned brown and wilted. Saddened though I was by the change, I noticed the vibrant green leaves and some blossoms still remaining. Then, I saw a cardinal on the nearby bird feeder looking at me. And for those of you who have heard me say it before, a cardinal has for quite some time been a sign of God's leading and wisdom for me. Then, it flew away.

Then it occurred to me, as if a still small voice were speaking, "Although the days may come and go, bringing with them usual and not so usual circumstances, they are all part of God's plan of life itself. Some will bring loss and sadness, others newness and joy, but all are in God's care and cycle of life."

And while our bulletin cover asserts, "The Holy Spirit changes everything," one thing remains the same . . . God's unfailing love, presence, provision, and plan for us. Indeed, if we love God and follow the way of Christ, the Holy Spirit will be with us and within us in a new and wonderful way!

While we may look to the future and plan ahead, sometimes we need to just take it one day at a time. Rather than worry about tomorrow, next week, or a month from now, focus on the needs and blessings of today. Some people are stressing out so much about whether they will have jobs or businesses if everything doesn't return to the old familiar way soon, they may overlook the possibility of things getting even worse if adequate precautions aren't taken. On the other hand, we may worry so much about the possibility of things getting worse again, we may lose sight of the current needs of those around us as well.

News reports are expressing concern over increased mental illness and addiction in these times, caused by various influencing factors like isolation, loss and grief, uncertainty, etc.

Courtney Boulware of Ohio shares these words of advice from 1 Peter 5:7 (NIV) . . .

"Cast all your anxiety on [God] because he cares for you."

She tells this story in *The Upper Room* (5/12/20) . . .



“Following the birth of my first child, I had postpartum depression, and my husband was facing unemployment. It became clear that a career change was on the horizon for him, which added to the uncertainty we felt about the future. My husband and I both felt anxious about what was next for our family; we even thought we might need to move to another state.

“One morning my son was crying to be fed. As I prepared a bottle for him, I said, “*Calm down, Sweetie. When have I ever not given you what you need?*” As I said this, I realized that I had been crying out to God in fear about how and when my family’s needs would be met. I saw myself as a scared child, in need of something that I could not provide for myself. As I looked at my son, I knew that in a short while the sustenance he was waiting for would be provided — he would be full, content, and happy.

“What a picture of how God cares for us! In all my worry, God was near, inviting me to cast my fear, anxiety, doubt, and anger on him. Like a loving parent, God can and will provide for our needs.

She prays, “Loving God, when we can’t see the way forward, help us to trust that you can. Amen.”

And we who are blessed can be generous, sharing through the church or other ways to those in need in these difficult times, resulting in thanksgiving to God, our provider. And we can be thankful for government leaders who have the wellbeing of all people at heart and action.

I could also somewhat identify with Myrna Conrad of Florida, who shared her story with readers of *The Upper Room* on Friday (5/15/20).

She affirms the words of the Psalmist who wrote (143:10 CEB) . . . “*Teach me to do what pleases you, because you are my God. Guide me by your good spirit into good land.*”

And she writes . . .

“Even though my husband and I have relocated 21 times, I still find change difficult — it tends to bring out all my insecurities and worries.” Seeing how God worked to use her gifts and abilities in a more wonderful way in a new location after feeling a great deal of loss in one move especially difficult for her, she began to look back on other moves and could see that God was at work in each move.

“Through all my family’s relocations” she says, “I have learned that I can trust God to lead me in the right direction.” She goes on to say . . .

“When faced with an opportunity that requires change, we can ask God to guide us. Because God loves us and wants us to lead lives of significance and meaningful service, God will answer our prayers for direction — not only through scripture but also through the wisdom of Christian friends and mentors. God’s answer may not always be what we prefer to do, but we can know that following God’s direction is always best.”

One of my favorite scripture passages for such times is Jeremiah 29:11-13 (NRSV). As he proclaimed God’s word to an exiled people of Israel in Babylon. “***For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. When you search for me you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart.***”

So, whatever the change and uncertainty you may be faced with now or in the future, know that



God is with you. God has plans for you; to benefit and not to harm you.

Whatever you are facing right now, whether loss or hardship, realize the presence and power of the Holy Spirit to comfort and strengthen you. Remember the words of David who knew both loss and hardship and yet affirmed, “*The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.*” (Psalm 34:18)

Do as the psalmist who directed music did, saying to the Lord, “*When I am afraid, I put my trust in you.*” (Psalm 56:3) It is that trust, my friends, that gives us a peace that passes understanding of our present condition and uncertainty about the future.

And remember the words of the Apostle Paul to the early Christians in Corinth. “*This slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal glory outweighing them beyond all measure.*” (2 Corinthians 4:17)

Friends, there are better days ahead here on earth and even greater ones in the life beyond this one. With the Holy Spirit you and I can meet the tests and trials we face in life.

So, have faith, patience, perseverance, endurance in following the way of Christ Jesus. Let your heart, mind and soul ever be open to the indwelling Holy Spirit, guiding you with wisdom and righteousness into a living hope for tomorrow.

And as we move forward in the uncertainty of tomorrow, live each day bearing the good fruit of the Holy Spirit, so that others will know that we live in Christ and Christ in us. Let us love God, one another, and all the people of God’s creation. For regardless of the uncertainty of days ahead, we can be sure of God’s loving presence and power. We can be sure of God’s plan for good and not harm.

We can live through change and uncertainty with assurance in Jesus, our living Savior and Lord!