

John 14:1-12

Easter 5; May 7 & 8, 2023

There was a news story that caught my eye this past week. I assume that many of you saw it. On last Tuesday, the Surgeon General of the United States released an Advisory calling attention to the public health crisis of loneliness, isolation, and lack of connection with people in the US. The report stated that there is recent research showing that approximately half of U.S. adults experienced loneliness on a daily basis, even before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic which had begun a little over 3 years ago.

It stated that human beings are wired for social connection, but we have become more isolated over time. Today, loneliness is more widespread than other major health issues in the U.S. Loneliness and isolation has become a major public health concern. According to the report, insufficient social connection has been linked to an increased risk of heart disease, stroke, anxiety, depression and dementia. Lacking social connection has the same health consequences as smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day or drinking six alcoholic beverages a day. Do you know what age group was hit especially hard? The loneliness epidemic is hitting young people from 15 to 24 years old especially hard. That age group reported a 70% drop in time spent with friends during the last three years. Another recent study stated that 61% of those between the ages of 18-25 are experiencing loneliness.

Because of this epidemic, research is showing that Americans, who have become less engaged with worship houses, community organizations and even their own family members in recent decades, have steadily reported an increase in feelings of loneliness. The number of single households has also doubled over the last 60 years. The report listed a number of things that has helped this crises grow faster like COVID-19, technology, social media and a number of other causes.

Maybe you can see why this report caught my eye. We live in a world that is becoming a very loneliness place. If we are honest with ourselves, I see that happening in our lives as well. I think most, if not all of us, get loneliness. It is no wonder why Jesus' disciples suddenly felt really alone when Jesus said that he was about to leave them.

John writes: **"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going."**

Put yourself in the place of the disciples that Maundy Thursday evening when Jesus speaks these words. Celebrating the Passover was supposed to be a joyous occasion, but I'm guessing you could have cut through the tension in that room with a knife. Rumors were circulating around town that Jesus was a wanted man. Where would that leave them? Who would take over after Jesus was gone? Maybe that was the reason why the argument about who was the greatest broke out among them earlier that evening? Things didn't seem to be going as planned.

Jesus had already washed their feet. He had already pointed out the disciple who would betray him. Peter had already sworn that he would never disown Jesus. Jesus told him that before the rooster crowed twice he would deny him three times. So, who's hungry? I'm guessing that the disciples may not have felt very hungry anymore.

Ever feel like those disciples? What is it that troubles you? Is it the guilt of a sin or sins you committed years or months or weeks or days ago that just doesn't seem to let you go? Is it fear over the unknown for yourself or a loved one, a fear that holds a tight grip on your heart and threatens to choke the hope of eternal life out of you? Is it grief over the loss of a loved one that just never seems to leave you? Is it worry over the troubling events of the present, of the scary economic and political situations of our nation and communities or of the health problems and the piling bills and the family arguments and the selfish attitudes and the stress of an overfilled schedule all happening now? What troubles your heart? To our troubled hearts, Jesus responds, **"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me."**

Jesus looked at the group of people sitting with him in that upper room and he wanted them to remember one thing. They would not be alone. **“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me... If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”** Did you catch the hope and promise in Jesus’ words? Did you hear how these words calm troubled hearts? Jesus doesn’t say that he is A way to heaven. He says he is THE way to heaven. Not just the way to heaven, but he is truth and he is life.

Picture in your minds this – the airplane briefing before every flight. The flight attendant gives a safety briefing. They talk about how important it is to have your seat belt on when in your seat. If you are sitting in those exit rows, one of them will ask you to give them a verbal confirmation that you are able to help people get out of the plane in the case of emergency. You will say, *yes*. (*In your mind, you are also thinking that it is also nice to have a little more leg room on that flight.*) That briefing will always stress the importance of putting your own oxygen mask on before helping others, because they know you can’t help anyone if you are not breathing. They tell you that if they have to make a landing on water, there is a life vest under your seat. They tell you that if there is an emergency, just leave your stuff and go.

Why go through all those instructions? They know that if there is an emergency, they want you to remember those instructions. The disciples world was about to feel like severe turbulence in the sky. Their world would soon seem to be crashing down. Everything was soon going to feel uncertain. Yet, Jesus wanted them to remember: **“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me.”** In other words: *Trust Me!* Jesus says to you and me those same words. Trust Me! Don’t give up. You have my promise that you will never be alone! I will ALWAYS be there for you. Those were words that those disciples in that room needed to hear that night. They are words that we need to hear every day as well. May God grant it. Amen.