May 7, 2023 **ENDURING WITNESS**

In our Gospel text for this Sunday, the fourteenth chapter of John, the disciples of Jesus ask a series of questions in response to their anxiety about his announcement that the end of his life is near. As the 14th chapter of John opens, we see Jesus and His apostles in the upper room where they have had the Passover meal together. Jesus knew exactly what the next few hours would bring. Jesus knew Judas would betray Him. Jesus knew He would be arrested. Jesus knew about the trials and the beatings. Jesus knew He would die on the cross. Considering all this Jesus tried to prepare the disciples for what they were about to endure, so Jesus began to comfort them.

In this life we face many trials. People lose jobs. Some have physical problems or sudden diagnosis of cancer or terminal illness. Others are lonely and depressed. We experience all kinds of troubles. Jesus says that part of the solution to a troubled heart is trust. He tells His disciples to trust in 3 things.

The first thing that Jesus is telling us this morning is to trust in His PRESENCE. Jesus is the life. The gospel passage for this Sunday St. John 14:1 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. To communicate His love, God did not just send an angel or speak through a prophet. Jesus came and lived with us. That is what we are celebrating at the communion table today, the fact that Jesus came. He gave us His presence. When Jesus left, he gave us two extensions of His presence, the **Holy Spirit** which lives inside us and the **church**which is around us. We need to trust in His presence.

Jesus is saying, "I know you trust in God. You can trust me as well. Remember, even when you can no longer see me, don’t stop trusting in me." All of us seem to have a much easier time trusting in things that we can see and touch. It is the things we cannot see often that we have the hardest time trusting.

The Bible teaches us that the things we can see are only temporary. All of it will one day be gone. The automobile in which you rode to church today is temporary. This building, the pews on which you are sitting, are all temporary. All are subject to decay. All of this will someday be gone. We need to learn to trust even when we do not see the substance of our faith. This is especially difficult when things do not seem to be going according to plans.

The key to calming our fears, conquering our anxiety, Jesus says, is believing in God, believing that, no matter what the current circumstances of our lives may be, God has a place for us in the kingdom, a place prepared for us by Jesus himself. The disciples heard Jesus say that, and it is recorded in the Bible. But I still think some folks in the church don’t believe him even today. Some of us are still confused and unclear about exactly what Jesus was trying to say.

Sometimes we are more keenly aware of God’s presence. At other times, we feel as if God must be a million miles away. In either case, the ultimate question we must ask ourselves is, "Do you believe in Jesus Christ? Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of the Living God?" And if your response is "Yes," then go on living in hope because there is a place for you in the kingdom of God, a place prepared for you by Jesus himself.

But I have yet another question for you this morning, what if the place Jesus has prepared for you is the place where you are right now? If you would like to learn more about how to trust in Jesus' presence, 2. Jesus promises and 3. Jesus' Path to journey with him, please join us in our worship on Sunday at 11:00 AM.

Rev. Dr. Christopher Ponnuraj

Minister

West Center Congregational Church