**St. Paul’s Lutheran Church
Wildwood, Missouri**

**Fifth Sunday of Easter**

**John 14: 1-12**

**May 10, 2020**

When my mother was about five years old, her mother died. Living in an era when the roles of men and women were a bit more traditional, my grandfather found himself in the difficult role of raising two small children alone. Worse yet, economic times were not good in Ireland at the time. It wasn’t that Ireland’s economy was bad, it was that Ireland’s economy was nonexistent. Jobs were few and far between. Life was hard but at least they were together as a family.

For a few years, my grandfather struggled along trying to make ends meet and to provide a home as best he knew how. Finally, however, he vowed that he wanted something better for his children which led to one of the most difficult decisions of his life: he would leave Ireland to build a home; a new home for his family in the United States. His decision, however, meant that he would have to leave my mother and her brother behind in Ireland.

My grandfather’s plan was to follow the American dream. In the 1940's, America was still very much seen by the world as the *“land of opportunity.”* It was, if I may borrow a phrase, his *“promised land”* and he promised both my mother and my uncle that he would do whatever it took to buy a home and to establish himself in the states. It would take some time, perhaps even years, but he would prepare a place and when he did, he would come back for them so that they could be with him. He left them with his sister and a promise, *“I’ll come back so you can be with me.”*

You can imagine that his departure wasn’t easy on my mom or her brother. Think about being ten years old, your mother is dead and your father has just told you he was leaving for an indefinite period of time. It wasn’t that she didn’t love her aunt, but, she had already lost her mom and she was never coming back. Now she was losing her dad who was not only moving, but moving clear to the other side of the world. Worse, who knew how long it would be before she saw him again. Her life, her world, her future seemed very uncertain. She was understandably confused and troubled. What sense of security she had was packing his things and getting on a boat to America?

In our Gospel reading for today, we see Jesus’ disciples who were confused and troubled for very much the same reason. Jesus, who provided them with their sense of security, had just told them that he was leaving them. And, not only that, he told them that he was going to a place where they could not come. His departure would not be easy on them, but he left them with something very important. Jesus left them with a promise; a very significant promise straight from the mouth of God himself.

Now, I realize that the reading from John 14 for today may seem to be a little out of sequence after having just celebrated Easter. One would expect today’s lesson to be one of the post-resurrection stories of our Lord. But, I need you to forget that for a moment and to put on your pre-resurrection, pre-crucifixion mind and jump back to Maundy Thursday. You see, what we are reading is the beginning of a rather lengthy section of the gospel of John which details Jesus’ conversation with his disciples while they were in the upper room. Overall, Jesus’ discourse is one of comfort and meant to sooth the troubled hearts of the disciples because there was a lot for them to be troubled about.

To understand their distress, you really have to place yourselves in the shoes of the disciples for a minute. For three years, they had invested their time and energies into following Jesus. He was their master, teacher, leader and friend. They relied on him. They depended on him. They looked forward to Jesus bringing in his kingdom, in which, by the way, they were promised a significant role.

With shouts of “*hosanna”* and “*blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord,”* on Palm Sunday, the week started everything off on a very positive note. If you were a disciple, things were looking up. From their perspective, the future seemed bright as they were on the brink of great things happening.

But Jesus bursts their bubble, so to speak, by telling them that things were going to get bad. He would be betrayed by one of them. Peter, would not only deny him, but deny him three times and that Jesus, who had been the center of their lives for three years was leaving them. He was leaving them just when things were looking up. Now what would happen? What would they do without Jesus? From their perspective, he could not have picked a worse time to go? More specifically, what would they do? What would happen to them? Where would they go?

We are *“hard-wired,”* if you will, to seek a sense of security in our lives. For children, it comes in their parents. Children seek the stability of knowing that mom and dad are always going to be around. Child development experts will tell you that having a stable, two parent home is the most significant factor in a child’s positive development. Even teenagers, who seem always to be rebelling against their parents, have indicated in a recent study that they want closer ties with parents and that those who do ultimately lead happier lives.

Adults also seek security. They seek in their relationship with others. Others seek it from stable employment or a 401K which won’t go belly-up. We all want a sense that everything is going to be *“OK,”* both now and in the future and when it seems that things aren’t working out, we too, get troubled. When you think about, isn’t the bottom line with feelings of insecurity a worry about the future? And when I say future, I don’t mean just what will happen in general in the world. I mean what will happen to me specifically; the same sort of feelings the disciples would have been having. Uncertainty about the future leads to, to borrow Jesus’ words, *“troubled hearts.”*

And, let’s face it, we live in an insecure world. It is remarkable to me the number of parents that simply walk away from their responsibilities in our culture. They simply decide not to parent. What does that do to a child sense of stability and security?

Economically speaking, I don’t know that you can count on much anymore. The employment situation in our country offers absolutely no guarantees any longer. By the time this pandemic is over, they are expecting unemployment rates to hit around 19 percent. Everything has become more insecure. It used to be that the norm was you got a job with a company. You were loyal to that company for 20 or 30 years and the company was loyal to you until you retired. That is certainly not the case now. You can’t count on anything any longer. There is this underlying sense of insecurity.

Spiritually, speaking, it’s the same way. We want a secure relationship with God and we want the security of knowing where our ultimate future lies. Adam and Eve had that security once. God walked and talked with them in garden. He loved them and moreover, they knew that he did. They were certain of it. But, for a taste of fruit they gave all that up. Worse, because of their sin, it left all humanity, including you and me, with that nagging sense of insecurity regarding our relationship with God. Does he really love me? How do I know? Is my behavior offending God? How do I know he isn’t angry with me? How do I know he loves me? Is there any way to gain back that security which was lost?

The answer to that last question is a loud and certain, *“yes.”* *“Do not let your hearts be trouble. Trust in God; trust also in me.”* To the disciples who felt that their world was crumbling around them, Jesus offers these gracious words of comfort and friends his words are not ordinary words. Listen closely to what Jesus is telling them. *“Trust in God; trust also in me.”* Do you see what he is doing? Jesus is making a claim to being God. He placed himself on equal footing with the Father as the object of their faith.

What Jesus is saying is this: as legitimate as it is to trust what the Father has told them, so too is it legitimate to trust the words of the Son. The words of comfort and security that Jesus speaks to his disciples are from the voice of God himself and there are no more secure words in the universe than those that come from God.

You see, we must understand something about the Words which come from the mouth of God. His words carry the weight of accomplishing whatever he promises. I will say that again, God’s words can accomplish whatever he promises. When he says, *“Let there be light,”* there is light! When he says, *“You are my child,”* you are his child! When he says, *“Your sins are forgiven,”* your sins are forgiven! When his Word promises that a child in the waters of baptism, is washed clean of his sins, he is washed clean of his sins. And here, in this text, he promises all who believe in him a future, a secure future, with him in heaven.

Jesus said *“In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. 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.”* The future for all who follow Jesus, for all who trust in him, is in the Father’s house. This is where your future lies and this is the Word which comes from Jesus our God to comfort troubled hearts. He has prepared your future for you. He has built a new home, a new place for you. He has prepared a place for your eternity. How did he prepare your future home? Well, he didn’t do it with brick and mortar, but with wood and nails which were in the shape of a cross.

Your heavenly home, my heavenly home, was built on the death and resurrection of Jesus our Savior. His sacrifice of his life for our sins has made our future secure because it restored the security of God’s love for us. Paul, so confident of this fact, puts it this way in Romans 8, nothing, absolutely nothing *“in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* His blood has secured both God’s love and your future. His death and resurrection have guaranteed a life with him in paradise.

His departure to be with his Father was not an abandonment to an insecure world, but it marked the completion of his mission— a mission planned and carried out by God designed to open up heaven for all who trust in the name of Jesus. He has given his word and it will be done. Your God, Jesus Christ has spoken. Your God, Jesus Christ has made a promise to you and you can find complete security in that promise; complete security.

For my mother, even though it was hard at times, she always believed my grandfather would come back for her. She believed his promise and he did return for my mother and her brother. Yes, it did take some time, more than ten years because of immigration delays after WWII broke out. But he did return just as promised and just as promised he prepared a new home for them in the *“promised land.”* *“The rest,”* so they say, *“is history.”*

It has been far more than ten years since our Lord ascended to his Father, but his sure and certain word of promise to us is that he will return to take us to the *“promised land”* and his promise for us is still just as valid as it was two thousand years ago. My friends, Jesus is coming back for us. So, do not let your hearts be troubled, instead, rest secure in the promises of Jesus. He is coming and soon. Therefore, let our prayer always be, “*Amen, Lord Jesus, come!*” In the name of Jesus. Amen.