

Come Holy Spirit, touch our minds and think with them, touch our lips and speak with them, and touch our hearts and set them on fire with love for you. Amen.

I don't know about you all, but I was really surprised when that door slammed. The surprise for me is usually people storm out and slam the door about half way through my sermon, not at the beginning of the service.

Every moment in history has its challenges. Those first Christians endured persecutions as the story of Stephen reminds us. The Reformation, which we commemorate 500 years ago this year, occasioned great renewal to be sure, but also enormous conflicts and the deaths of countless souls. Some our ancestors in this country endured slavery and Jim Crow. Others fought a Civil War over the question of race and slavery. Two World Wars, a depression, a cold war, defined the last century, and this century seems to be defined already by 9/11 and The Great Recession.

In these days we find significant tensions over race, wealth, civility, truth. I guess that great Chinese curse seems to always be applicable even to this day. May you always live in interesting times, indeed. Regardless of the travail of earlier times, these are our times, this is our day and they are troubled times. Just this past week Russia and all of that, North Korea and missiles, greenhouse gasses, shrinking glaciers, a warming planet; these are troubled times. Closer to home, into our own homes, our own lives: a dear one with cancer, a broken relationship, deep depression seeping in.

Our hearts are troubled and too often we look to quiet our anxieties and assuage our troubles in all the wrong places and all the wrong ways. We practice in our national affairs 'an eye for an eye' and we have wars that seemingly will not end. We're fearful of not having enough and so we hold, preserve and conserve, accumulating while too many are without basic necessities. It's sort of a late 20th century phenomenon that continues the concept of gated communities and staying behind doors to create a sense of security, to quiet our anxieties, and then others dull our senses in various and sundry ways.

Our hearts are troubled. And in the midst of this time and this day, Jesus comes. Even as the shadows of the cross darken his path, he offers immortal words of comfort and calm. I can almost imagine they're offered in a whisper, "Do not let your hearts be troubled, believe in God, believe also in me. In my father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go prepare a place for you? And if I

go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself, so that where I am there you also may be."

There's a reason that this gospel lesson is such a frequent reading at memorial services, often heard in the words of the King James version, "In my father's house are many mansions", this feeling, the bountifulness of that place. He gives us a glimpse through the veil of the peaceable kingdom, it's almost too good to be true, too distant, too removed, too fanciful. Thomas puts those doubts and lingering skepticism into words and says, "Lord, we don't know where you're going. How can we know the way?" And Jesus opens the door to wonder and awe, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life."

In a few minutes we'll hear George Herbert poetically taking us into that deeper place in our communion hymn, when we sing, "Come, my way, my truth, my life. Such a way as gives us breath, such a way as ends all strife, such a way that killeth death."

Are your hearts troubled? Jesus gives us the answer, the way, His path. Are your hearts troubled? He gives us the truth, His teaching. Are your hearts troubled? He gives you the life, the hope, and promise of a new reality. This baptism today, the promises today of faith that others and all of us will make, articulate that way and gather ourselves as an outward and visible sign of the Jesus movement for the world.

That way of Jesus looks something like the promises that we all will make to continue in the apostles' teaching, in fellowship and the breaking of the bread and in the prayers. To be a people that are about forgiveness, repenting of our own brokenness and acknowledging of that in others and repairing relationships, and that gives us the ability to proclaim good news of what God is doing in our lives, which changes our orientation to each other and the person we don't know....that seeking and serving Christ and all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves. We can stand up, we can stand up and strive for justice and peace among all people, respecting the dignity of every human being.

These are the promises that define us and say who and whose we are. We live into these promises of our baptism. Jesus changes us, and the Epistle that we read today names that change. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of Him who called you out of darkness into light, into

marvelous light. You once were not a people, but now you are God's people. That's it. We're formed by God, we're God's people. We name it the body of Christ, there's nothing more secure, there's nothing more eternal, there's nothing more that we can ask for or receive. It is for this that we are richly made.

When many are fearful, we choose a different way; where many are angry, we choose a different way; when so many are selfish, we choose a different way. We are here because we choose to follow a Galilean rabbi. We're here because of He who came and taught us a different way. We're here because somebody some place told us the story, and somebody told them the story, and somebody told them the story all the way back to those first disciples. We're here to be part of something new, something godly and good, beyond our imagining, because on the first day of the week those women went to the tomb and they met the risen Christ.

We're here because we are an Easter people. When I was 14 years old I went off to boarding school in a small town in Tennessee. I'm sort of an odd person, you may have already thought that, but I'm an odd person because I asked to do it. I wasn't sent away to boarding school, I want to clear that up right now, but it changed my life. Truth be told, I was troubled in so many ways and I guess I intuitively knew it. My parents' marriage had collapsed and in the room next to mine, my brother was descending into a world of pain and addiction that would take his life in just a few years.

And that time was an open question what I would give my heart to. I went off to Bell Buckle, Tennessee, a town of 350 people. and I simply lived my life in the rhythms of the school, attending chapel, taking my classes, taking the honor code very seriously...they scared the death out of me... doing my homework, enjoying the deep comradery of the dorm. But even still, deeper choices, deeper decisions awaited me. What brought me to my knees was nothing earth shaking, nothing overly dramatic at all, but really more just coming in contact with a nurturing small church community that did the simple thing of welcoming a stranger.

It took a skinny, pimply, scared 14 year old 500 miles from home, my family had all but disintegrated, but among those farmers and small town business folk, I was accepted and actually loved. I belonged, I think, for the first time in my life.

That is the home that we find in baptism. That is the home that makes our own in confirmation. That is the

home that when we are received into this church we acknowledge home with Jesus.

"In my father's house are many dwelling places.."  
Your reservation is there. You once were not a people, but now you are a people.

The root of the Greek word that we translate "to believe", Credo, is to give one's heart to. What we're talking about and experiencing is not something we can think our way through, it's not up here [*motions to head*], it's here [*motions to heart*].

Jesus, yearning all for us, does not want us to give our hearts over to our troubles, but to give our hearts over to God, to believe in God, to give our heart to God, to give our heart to Jesus.

That's what we do this day, we believe, Credo, we give our heart to Jesus. We come together as a people and promise together: do not let your hearts be troubled. Come to these waters and become God's people. We are people who give our hearts to Jesus. He is the way, the truth, the life, and together we assemble into a movement of Jesus that transforms us and has the power to change the world.

So come. Come dear ones, come to these waters, come to this table. Come join with Jesus in restoring each other, ourselves in a broken world. Jesus has set it all in motion, let us follow.