

Scripture: John 14:15-21

Sermon Title: "Never Alone"

Rev. Josh Fitterling

What does the future hold? I'm sure many of us have asked that question from time to time. Often, we will find ourselves pondering such a question when we are at a crossroads in our life or at a point when we must take a big step of faith in determining the direction of our lives. Maybe this question came up for you in high school as you were beginning to determine a career path, or maybe this question really hit home when you were facing a layoff or financial crisis that shook the status quo of your life. Perhaps this question was pondered at the revelation of a new child that will enter your world or at the death of a loved one whose absence is noticeably felt. And in those moments of uncertainty, of the unknown – those moments that may be filled with a mixture of joy, of sorrow, of fear – we begin to wonder what does the future hold.

I'm sure the disciples of Jesus were deeply entrenched in this question particularly following the resurrection. For now that they knew that Jesus was indeed alive and they could see the power of the gospel message standing before them, with a mixture of joy and fear circulating among them, they knew that their life needed to be a continued journey of faith founded in the truth's revealed in Jesus. But what would that life look like? What would that future hold? Would this gospel news be met in the world with Palm's waving and crowds cheering or with crosses rising and crowds jeering? And then we realize that up until this point, the disciples have been able to physically follow Jesus and primarily hear him speak, see him act in the world, see the truth revealed through his life, death, and resurrection. Now what will happen? How will Jesus lead them? How will they be required to lead? Through it all, how will Jesus continue to be present in their lives and in their ministry? What does the future hold?

I bet that we all can relate to many of these questions ourselves. I know that many of these questions were at the forefront of my mind as I was discerning a calling to ministry. And while I was in college, I could tell, I could feel that it was time for an

answer – it was time for me to claim that “yes” and go for it. But what would the future hold? What would this ministry thing look like? How was Jesus leading me in it all? These were big questions met with tons of prayer and I finally knew that God was calling me into ministry and that I needed to go. I felt the confirmation of this calling and knew that Jesus was indeed walking with me into this new, unknown future. And so, once I knew that this was the path that God wanted me to follow, with that clarity coming several years after someone planted that seed within me, I made the decision to proceed down this new road even in the uncertainty of where that road would lead.

As you have probably already experienced and witnessed in life, the answers to the question “what does the future hold?” are often lived out and often only become clear in the living. That this question leads to deep discernment around what move to make next and that often times, we are left to hold this question with us for a long time as the future slowly appears through the fog of life. Answers about this question don’t often come quickly. And the future and its uncertainty, this can be a heavy thing to hold. But, we were never meant to hold it alone. We were never meant to hold this question alone. In fact, we were never meant to hold the joys and sorrow of life alone. We were never meant to hold the future alone.

For the disciples after the resurrection, they must be recalling these words that we hear today from the Gospel of John to find comfort – to recall the truth that whatever the future may hold, it is never held alone. For these words from John, which Jesus spoke in his ministry before the crucifixion, point toward the abiding presence of Jesus in their lives. Knowing that even when Jesus is no longer seen in the same way, the Holy Spirit will dwell within. Knowing that they, that we, will never be left orphaned for in Jesus is revealed God’s eternal care.

And yet, even knowing the presence of Christ, knowing that we will never be left alone, sometimes we still feel it, don’t we? Sometimes, we still feel alone. Because even when we trust that God is with us and guiding us, sometimes we still long for a friend to physically be by our side for support and encouragement. We long for the opportunity

to have someone to talk too and to feel their love and support in the ways in which they literally walk beside us. And do you know something, Jesus recognized the power in having people walking beside you through life too. Not just in the way in which he lived by gathering his disciples around him but in the very teaching that we hear today – Jesus knew all along that the physical absence of him would be a challenge for many as they walk in faith, and so he reminded them of the commandment that he gave.

Today we hear that Jesus said, if you love me, keep my commandments. And while Jesus spoke many things to the disciples throughout their time together and taught them many lessons, the only time Jesus explicitly gives a commandment according to the Gospel of John, is when he tells the disciples to love one another. That through this, the love of Jesus will always be shared in a tangible way, even when the physical presence of Christ is no longer present. In other words, with the church, you are also never alone. For with the gathering of disciples around you, you will always have a place to turn to find support, encouragement, and love as you face all that life holds.

When I made that decision to pursue a future in ministry, I knew that I was going where God was leading, but I still needed, I still longed for the tangible support, encouragement, and love from the people around me. I was grateful for college roommates that celebrated this decision. I was grateful for the many people who knew I would end up in ministry before I did. I was grateful for the outpouring of physical signs that this was indeed the path for me. Would I have continued anyway without the support of others who were physically around me? I would like to think that I would have. But was it made easier by being surrounded by people who were living out the command to love one another and who showed signs of Christ's presence in their physical being? Most definitely! And Jesus knew this power and in John, he reminded the disciples of it. Remember to love one another so that tangible signs of Christ's love will always abound to support and encourage all who need it.

Beloved in Christ, hold on to that knowledge – that you are indeed never alone. That God abides with you and that God's faithful people surround you always. That through

the challenges of life, the times of trial, the times of discernment, the times of difficult questions, the times of wondering what does the future hold, you are never alone for God is with you and so are we. Thanks be to God! Amen.