

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

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Peace in the Face of Death

February 5, 2017

Sermon Text: John 14:1ff

Scripture Reading: John 11

This past week a well known and well liked man in our community died, and I thought it would be good if we broke from our study of First Peter and devoted our time this morning to this matter of *death*.

- Why do we die?
- Is death something “natural” or is it something that is alien to God’s creation?
- What happens to us when we die?
- Is death forever?
- Will we ever see those who have died, again?

These are the kinds of questions that many people avoid completely (until their own time of death or that of a

loved one comes), or which other people simply dismiss with some quick and seemingly easy answer. And then there are some people who give serious and sober thought to these matters. These are the people we want to speak to this morning.

Listen to this passage of Scripture taken from the 14th chapter of John’s Gospel –

John 14:1-6 "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. (2) In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? (3) And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. (4) And you know the way to where I am going." (5) Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" (6) Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

These words were spoken by the Lord Jesus Christ immediately prior to his death on the cross. His words indicate to us that his disciples were “troubled.” Something was bothering them deeply. That something was this:

John 13:33-38 Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, '**Where I am going you cannot come.**' (34) A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. (35) By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (36) Simon Peter said to him, "**Lord, where are you going?**" **Jesus answered him, "Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward."** (37) Peter said to him, "Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." (38) Jesus answered, "Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times.

Jesus had told them, in other words, that He was going to leave them and they would not be able to go along with Him, yet. He was of course referring to the fact that He was about to be arrested, crucified, and put to death. They did not fully understand that, but they did know that He would

be leaving them and this threw them into a stir of worry.

This is why Jesus begins His words to them here in chapter 14 with, “Let not your hearts be troubled.”

Death troubles our hearts

Every normal human being, regardless of what kind of theory or philosophy they hold about death, finds themselves grievously *troubled* when death strikes close to them. And when our own death approaches, well, if we know it is coming, that is also a very troubling thing for us, to state it mildly.

Over the years I have, as have many of you, experienced and seen death. I have seen young people die in car crashes. I have seen a man who had just retired and he and his wife were just beginning their long-planned life of retirement, drop dead on a tennis court. We have had little children die in accidents, older and not so old people die of cancer. My own parents died not long ago and I have had friends killed in assorted circumstances.

And I have seen this “trouble of heart” that death brings to parents, to children, to friends and relatives, when that dreaded message comes to them. I have had to deliver such messages far

more often than I would have ever chosen to do.

Death troubles our hearts because death is *separation*. In addition to all the suffering that often leads up to death, when death comes it means that we are separated from the person who died.

And so whether His disciples fully realized it or not, the trouble of heart that they were experiencing was because Jesus was going to leave them – He was going to die.

And so our Lord addresses this heart trouble in these words. Listen to them again:

6 "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. (2) In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? (3) And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.

Believe in God, Believe in Christ

Here then is step one in dealing with the trouble of heart that comes when death strikes. Believe. Don't just "believe" – faith always has an object that it believes IN. Believe in God. Believe in Christ.

I have no words of comfort this morning for the atheist or for the person who chooses to worship an idol or some false god of their own making.

There are no words of comfort for people this morning who will not at least consider what God the Father and God the Son have said to us here in the Bible.

But for all who will believe in the God who created us and all the universe, who has revealed Himself to us in His creation and in His Son who came into this world, and in His written Word, the Bible, then here is comfort and certain hope even in the face of death.

So here then is step number one in having peace instead of a troubled heart:

1. Believe that God IS. That He exists.
2. Believe that Jesus Christ IS the Son of God
3. Believe what Christ has said to us (just read this Gospel of John for an introduction to what Jesus has said)

And just what is it He has said? Well, among many other things (to be found in the New Testament), He has said this:

- *In my Father's house are many rooms*
- *I am going to my Father's house to prepare a place for you*
- *I am going to come to you again*
- *And when I return I will not leave you, but I will take you with me*

What is the Father's House??

We know that after Christ died, He was raised up again three days later. And then, after being with His disciples once more so that they saw firsthand His resurrection from the dead, He returned to His Father. We call this the "ascension" of Christ. Here is the account:

Acts 1:3-11 He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. (4) And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me; (5) for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." (6) So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (7) He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. (8) But

you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (9) And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. (10) And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, (11) and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

So when Christ said that he was going "to My Father's house" he was talking about this ascension. He returned to where he had come from – to heaven. That is his Father's house. It is the real Temple.

The temple on earth that was built in Jerusalem was often called God's House –

Psalms 5:7 But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love, will enter your house. I will bow down toward your holy temple in the fear of you.

God's house, you see, is the place where God is, where He dwells (even though He is present everywhere by His Spirit). Christ returned then to the

presence of God, to heaven, to the true temple.

To Prepare a Place for You

Now Christ's words become promises to us. He says that in His Father's house there are "many rooms." *He doesn't mean simply that it is a really big mansion, but something more like this:*

My Father's House has room for all of you.

That is to say, there will never be a worry that Christ's people will one day arrive at that house and find a "no vacancy" sign hanging outside. Nope. Room for all.

In fact, as you find out if you study the rest of the New Testament (and even in parts of the Old Testament), the house of the Father *is the entire created universe.*

Isaiah 66:1 Thus says the LORD: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest?"

So that in fact THIS is what Jesus meant when He spoke of going back to the Father to prepare a place for us:

2 Peter 3:13 But according to his promise we are waiting for new

heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Let's see if we can put this right down in front of us in plain terms.

This present world is fallen. It is messed up, big time. One of the ways we know it is because of the presence and grief of *death*. Things are not right. Things are not as they were when the Lord originally created this world. Think it through carefully and you will see it.

People are not supposed to die. Suffering is not supposed to be. You are not even supposed to have to experience the death of a beloved pet, let alone the death of a child or wife or husband or parent or friend. *Death does not belong here.* It is an enemy. It is the result of *sin*. Our sin. Starting way back with the first man and woman in Eden.

James 1:14-15 But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. (15) Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

Romans 5:12 Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—

These things are true, and we know they are true, we are reminded powerfully and painfully that they are true every single time *death enters our own personal space*. Something is amiss. This is not how it is supposed to be. God is life, not death.

But our sin has alienated us from God, the source of life. We have all been, you might say, expelled from Eden because man chose to disobey God. Death came on the scene and here we are today.

Christ's Cross Laid a Foundation for a New Earth and New Heaven

In Christ, the Son of God, the Lord has set out to reverse death and bring us back into life. Into Eden you might say. This is how the cross did this:

Colossians 2:13-14 And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, (14) by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

Ephesians 2:1-8 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins (2) in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of

disobedience— (3) among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. (4) But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, (5) even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— (6) and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, (7) so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (8) For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,

Christ died for us, in other words, and paid our penalty which was death. So that we might live. This is the foundation work of the New Creation.

So Just What is this “Place”?

This is the part of the gospel's good news that I like to think about the most. The “place” that Christ went to prepare for us, His Father's House, *is nothing less than a new earth, a new universe, only without any trace of sin, of evil, of death*. None of that. Only what is right, what is good, and what is life. Man set back to – and even better

than – what he was before sin came into the world.

Now, understand well something that we have said here many times. This new earth is a real *earth*. A real universe. A real *place*. No room for some notion of a cloudy, vapory, spirit place where we float around with a harp.

That does nothing for me and I suspect the same is true of you.

I live in a small community by a river and near the coastal mountains. We have deer and elk and bears and all kinds of other animals. We cut firewood, we go fishing and all other sorts of things like that which I like. I do not want to trade that for some eternal cloud and a white hospital gown!

Well, the new heavens and new earth are real. They are going to be just as real as this one, and even more so. They will be like Eden BEFORE sin came. Before death entered. There will be streams and animals and trees and all the good stuff of this creation. But no death. Ever.

And that, once more, is the Father's House Jesus was talking about. He has been creating it for some time now and there is a special "room" for every single one of His people.

And this brings us back then to a very real question.

If Jesus promised His disciples that He would come again for them and take them to the Father's House, then why has this not happened? Peter and Paul and John and the others are all dead. Many of our own loved ones are dead and they died believing Jesus' promise to come for them. Are we not rather foolish to keep on believing that He is coming again?

Well, here is the answer:

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 (13) But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. (14) For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. (15) For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. (16) For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. (17) Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. (18)

Therefore encourage one another with these words.

See it? The resurrection. There is the answer. Christ rose from the dead and He is going to raise us as well. When Christ comes, and He most certainly will, He is going to raise up the bodies of those who have died believing that He is the Son of God and their Savior from sin and death, and there is going to be the greatest family reunion in the history of mankind!

Think it through carefully. Death has taken your loved one. You used to be able to go see that person and be with them and talk with them and know that you would see them tomorrow.

Death has now changed all that. They are gone. The most cruel thing about death is the painful separation it brings. Where did our loved one go? Where are they now? Do they even exist? Will I see them again?

Christ has answered all these questions. All who believe in Him, all who trust Him alone as God's remedy for sin and death, all who have humbled themselves before Him in repentance and faith, *are not dead when they die*. They are, as the Bible says, "with the Lord."

John 11:25-26 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall

he live, (26) and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

All of this and more, you see, is what Jesus meant by these words –

John 14:1-3 "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. (2) In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? (3) And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.