Grace to you and Peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

It is always important to give context to our Gospel readings – this reading is one of the best-known passages in all of scripture. It is part of the farewell narrative of Jesus on Maundy Thursday. This conversation with Jesus immediately follows Judas’ decision to betray Jesus, Jesus’ reminding the disciples that his time on earth is very short, and finally reminding Peter that he will deny Jesus three times…. listen to the last verses of John 13…..

33 Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and say to you - ‘Where I am going, you cannot come.’ 34 I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. 35 By this everyone 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, “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? Very truly, I tell you, before the cock crows, you will have denied me three times.

So when Jesus begins our Gospel lesson with the words, “do not let your hearts be troubled – he is speaking a word of reassurance to Peter and the other disciples in the midst of their troubled hearts, knowing that Jesus will be separated from them….

Jesus comforts them by reminding the disciples that there will always be room for them in God’s presence….

This is a poignant passage for us today. The longer this Covid 19 goes on – the less we truly know about what the future will bring.

I have been spending much time these days reading and listening to experts on this infection. The more I read and listen, the more I come to realize that the future is uncertain. There are no guarantees, there are no silver bullets for the short term – and because of that – our hearts are troubled. Whether we are worried about our health, our economic future, the future for our children or grandchildren. Our hearts are troubled today.

When we are uncertain about the future, it causes us to rethink relationships and goals. We begin to ponder where we think we should be, and where we think God should be.

We may find ourselves asking the same question that Thomas expresses in scripture today when he exclaims – “Lord we do not know where you are going – how can we know the way?” Or put another way – I am struggling to find you God – where are you – have you left me (us) behind to fend for ourselves?

So many plans that we have had are all abruptly changed – jobs ended, milestone family events like weddings, baptisms and even funerals postponed, career moves, like graduations and promotions on hold, and things we could never imagine even two months ago – how will I put food on the table, how can I pay my mortgage, when will my child return to school.
However, in this uncertainty we hear Jesus’ voice remind us – I am the way, the truth, and the life….Jesus meant these words to be a message of hope.

The disciples are told that they can take comfort that they have known Jesus – and in knowing Jesus, they know the loving presence of God….

But Phillip wants things simplified even more – he wants to get back to the basics – “Just show us the Father and we will be satisfied!” –

Phillip wants to know where God is in all of the upheaval of Jesus’ leaving them…..and dare say, don’t we want to know where God is in all of this current craziness that the world is facing?

And what does Jesus say to Phillip? – Jesus points back to the work that the disciples did along side of Jesus as they ate with Jesus in people’s homes, healed the sick in numerous houses. Jesus reminds them that they spread the good news of God’s love while living among the people. Jesus continues to remind them of all that God has done with and through them to that point – and encourages them that God is going to do even greater things through them into the future.

This passage brings me great hope – “Very truly I tell you, the one who believes in me will do the works that I do – and will do greater works than these!

In other words – Jesus reminds us that we work we do right here and right now is incredibly important– and that this work is just as – or even more so – than the work accomplished by the disciples with Jesus present…..

And so I am reminded today of the courage and faith of God’s people – and light that continues to emanate from their service even in the midst of great unknowns about this crisis – I think of health care workers and teachers, truck drivers and retail clerks, government workers, and those who continue to maintain the infrastructures of our countries throughout the world. The scientists and economists who continue to provide understanding to this complex situation that we are facing. It is there service – there love that is so very important in this moment – and that is where God is!

But I also think of the service that each of us are providing by living into being good citizens during this time by sheltering in place and practicing physical distancing….

A 25 year old woman who is caring for her father who is vulnerable to this virus wrote this in her blog this week…

“I take my dad on walks through our neighborhood each day in his wheelchair. I notice something over and over again, as we get close on the sidewalk to another person – the neighbors swing away to give us room. This gesture, the way the neighbors move away from us is a small example of this puzzling reality – in order to stay safe, we must stay away. We stay away in order to remain, in a way, together.

If we are afraid enough of one another, or for one another, we may be able to save each other. Love and fear, distance and solidarity, have never been so obviously conjoined.”
These are scary and uncharted waters…..scarier in scale than many things that we have faced over the past several decades. But Jesus is reminding his disciples and us, as we trust the Holy Spirit, that God will continue to guide us, go ahead of us, dwell within us and making room for us.

Shane Claiborne is an evangelical who spoke at the ELCA National Youth Gathering in New Orleans several years ago….I was inspired by his story and his ministry – so I have been following him on Facebook for several years.

Just yesterday he published a prayer by a Danish Pastor Kaj Munk who was killed by the Gestapo at age 45 for his opposition to the Nazi’s…I share a portion of with you today….

“What is, therefore, our task today? Shall I answer ‘Faith, hope and love?’ That sounds beautiful.
But I would say courage….
For what we Christians lack is not psychology or literature... we lack a holy rage…
The ability to rage when justice lies prostrate on the streets,... a holy anger about the things that are wrong in the world.
To rage against complacency.
To restlessly seek that recklessness that will challenge and seek to change human history until it conforms to the norms of the Kingdom of God.
And remember: the signs of the Christian Church have been the Lion, the Lamb, the Dove, and the Fish... but never the chameleon. Amen”

We yearn to be on the other side of this tragedy right now. But I am convinced that when we look back on all of this – we will understand that Jesus was with us.

The promise of our faith is simple – God is here. God is best experienced as we love one another as God has love us! God knows that we are worried, upset, and lost.

But our faith speaks to all of those fears, listen to the words of Jesus – “Do not let your hearts be troubled, believe in God, believe also in me”.

Act with compassion. Act with courage. For in our Action – God is with us! His presence is most complete in our love for others.
Amen.