

**May 7, 2023**  
**Troubled Hearts**  
**John 14:1-14**

*"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe<sup>[a]</sup> in God; believe also in me. <sup>2</sup>In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>3</sup>And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. <sup>4</sup>And you know the way to the place where I am going."<sup>[c]</sup> <sup>5</sup>Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" <sup>6</sup>Jesus said to him, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. <sup>7</sup>If you know me, you will know<sup>[d]</sup> my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."*

*<sup>8</sup>Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." <sup>9</sup>Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? <sup>10</sup>Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. <sup>11</sup>Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, but if you do not, then believe<sup>[e]</sup> because of the works themselves. <sup>12</sup>Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. <sup>13</sup>I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. <sup>14</sup>If in my name you ask me<sup>[f]</sup> for anything, I will do it."*

Please pray with me:

God be in our heads and in our understanding. God be in our eyes and in our looking. God be in our mouths and in our speaking. God be in our hearts and in our thinking. Amen

Tim was the bow tie pastor. He was called to serve a prestigious congregation in Des Moines and his intellectual capacity was well-suited for his congregation. He possesses a vocabulary that leaves me wanting for a dictionary. He served his congregation well for many years and my husband and I had the good fortune of being in a study group with him the last few years of his tenure as a pastor. He is the last person I would expect to say, "I think I'll retire early, buy some land, and start a little sustainable farm."

And yet, that is what he did. He studied sustainable practices, bought lots of fancy equipment, and through trial and error he and his wife began Taproot Farm. I had to laugh when one of the first things he did was get his insulated coveralls embroidered with his Taproot logo.

He chronicled his journey, which included much trial and error, in blog posts, and continues to this day to reflect upon his learnings and experiences via blogging. He also holds retreats for pastors and hosts joy-filled gatherings on his property. Eloquent with words, he speaks of seeds, and chickens, and heirloom tomatoes as purveyors of divine wisdom. Though, at times, I still scratch my head at the thought of Tim being a farmer, I am in awe of how he pursued his dream and turned it into a ministry.

In the cold days of February, Tim blogged about surviving winter, and the plants and animals that manage to do it. As if you are standing there with him, contemplating the beehives on his property, he writes:

*“There is no heater nearby moderating their environment, nor have I added insulation to the hive boxes. The bees, we learned, benefit as well from some physiological modifications, but mostly, like the chickens, from behavioral ones: they form themselves into something of a ball at the center of the hive - huddling together, as it were. From there they are constantly trading positions - those on the outer portions of the ball moving inward toward the warmer center, while those duly warmed migrate out to the edges; a circulation constantly underway so that everyone takes its turn; everyone does its part.”<sup>1</sup>*

In diving into our scripture passage for today I discovered something I didn’t know. Jesus is giving a long farewell speech to his disciples. He has washed their feet, they have eaten together, and now he is about to tell them that winter is about to arrive. It may seem trivial, but it made me curious to learn that when Jesus says, “Let not your hearts be troubled,” the “your” in that sentence is plural and the “hearts” in the sentence is technically singular. Translators add the “s” on hearts because it seems to make sense to do so. But what if Jesus is talking about their collective heart? Let not your heart be troubled. I had to sit with that for a while.

My mind drifted to that circulating blob of bees at the center of their hive, surviving winter. They survive by being one – one with another. If that energy or instinct that tells them to huddle and rotate is disturbed or troubled – they do not survive.

Jesus knows winter is coming. Hardships and trials will come. He is telling the disciples what they need to know to endure. And he is telling his followers of every age what we need to know to survive the harsh realities of life.

In this same speech, Jesus gives his disciples the command to love one another. Later he prays for them. With tenderness and concern, he prays that they will be one. And near the conclusion, Jesus says, “Take heart, have courage, for I have overcome the world.”

Jesus is telling his disciples it is time to huddle up, confident that the harshness of trials and tribulations will not get the last word. They have a home with God. The love they have known in Jesus is God, and this love will sustain them.

I know that many of my sermons focus on loving others as Jesus loved. Love the stranger – love your enemies – love those in need – love those you’ve never met. “Go and love,” I tell you – “Go and be God’s light in the world” – “Go to where people are hurting.” “Go! Go! Go!”

Some Sundays, I have the nerve to get personal. Prodding you to take a good hard look at yourselves, nudging you to act, urging you to grow and be transformed, provoking you to root out

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<sup>1</sup> <https://taprootgarden.blogspot.com/search?q=one+anothering>

prejudice and privilege, daring you to imagine the kingdom of God, asking you, again and again to give and to serve.

And you have not run me off. Just the opposite. You have stepped up. As individuals and as a church. Shannon Harper purchased 51 \$50 gift cards on behalf of Disciples Women this week, to give to the Priority Center as part of their Mother's Day gift baskets. We are now doing a weekly food distribution with Mary's Kitchen, providing groceries for 90+ families every week. We host blood drives and community gatherings. We are open our campus to community serving organizations. We loaded up a car full of Easter Baskets for the friendly center and take food there monthly. We collect school supplies so no kid will go without what they need to thrive. We continue the work of becoming a safe space for the LGBTQ+ community. We are pressing ahead in learning about the pervasiveness of racism in all its forms. We are helping those in need with our Good Samaritan Fund. We are assisting in helping 9 families, fleeing the horrors of war in Afghanistan, resettle in the U.S. You have been generous with your time and your money. Many of you are driving your neighbor to doctors' appointments, sending cards, making calls, doing what you can to serve and to love, and to stand up to hate and injustice. Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!

Jesus pushed his disciples hard, teaching them to follow a way that is so contradictory to the world in which we live. He taught them to be servants and ministers of the way of compassion, forgiveness, service, and love.

Yes, Jesus pushed and prodded his disciples to learn the way, yet when we get to this farewell address Jesus turns his attention to his disciples...to offer consolation for the days ahead. Jesus is tender and compassionate, and he speaks words of comfort, hope, and encouragement.

That is what I want to offer you today – comfort, hope, and encouragement. Today I want to turn my attention to you, whether you are online or here in this sanctuary. I know I don't know everyone's story – but I do know that some of you are wondering how you are going to survive the challenges you are facing. Cancer, dementia, financial struggles, discouragement, depression, loneliness, grief, fear, worry, regret, loss of ability, the weight of caregiving, addiction, self-loathing, not being able to do what you once did, overwhelming concern for a child... So many of you are carrying heavy loads as you strive to follow the way of Jesus.

We cannot forget that our ministry as a church is not just "out there." It is also right here, with one another.

Gerhard Lohfink, coined the expression "one anothering." In his book *Christ in Community*, he calls attention to several of the "one anothering" passages in the Christian scriptures --

*Love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor (Rom. 12:10)*

*Live in harmony with one another (Rom. 12:16)*

*Welcome one another (Rom. 15:7)*

*Have the same care for one another (1 Cor. 12:25)*

*Bear with one another in love (Eph. 4:2)*

*Build one another up (1 Thess. 5:11)*

*Encourage one another (1 Thess. 4:18)*

*Confess your sins to one another (James 5:16)*

*Admonish one another (Rom. 15:14)*

*Be hospitable to one another (1 Peter 4:9).*

Then, of course, there is Jesus saying, “Love one another as I have loved you.”

We are not just a collection of individuals. We share a heart. Our collective heart is found in one another.

“Love one another,” Jesus tells his disciples. Huddle up, care for one another. Surely winter comes for all of us – we need each other to survive.

“Let not your heart be troubled,” he speaks with affection – be as one – as you face heartbreak and struggles. “Believe in me,” he says. “Believe that what you are facing today will not get the last word.

Maybe you’re thinking, “Hey, life is pretty good for me right now – this doesn’t pertain to me. Perhaps we can learn from the bees – they take turns being on the outside – so that that the coldest can be warmed in the middle only to return the outside of the ball to be a comfort to those who have faced the cold.

M. Scott Peck opened his famous book, “The Road Less Traveled,” with these three words, “Life is hard.” And it is true. But we have one another – and we have our faith.

My hope and my prayer is that we can be more than a collection of individuals who sit beside each other on Sunday, or tune in online, and then go our separate ways. We share the loving heartbeat of God, and in that love we find our home, and we find God.

You likely don’t know what the person sitting next to you is going through. I once heard someone say, “Treat each person you meet as if their heart has just been broken.” It’s a good reminder for us.

In our passage for today, Thomas wants a road map, and Philip wants proof of God. And in our darkest moments we want those things too. We want to know where our journey is headed. We want proof that God is still with us and acting. But Jesus gives us neither. “Love one another as I have loved you,” there you will find what you need.

May we learn from Jesus, and the bees, the art of one anothering. May our heart not be troubled. Amen.