

Sermon, *Do Not Let Your Hearts Be Troubled*
The Very Rev. David J. Marshall, All Angels 11.16.25

Isaiah 61:1-3
Psalm 23
1 John 4:7-12
John 14:1-6

I have some good news and some bad news about your heart. Now, I'm not a cardiologist so it's not like receiving bad news that way. Speaking of, my friend Phil Hadley told me that every time he went to visit his cardiologist, he'd look at Phil's chart and say, "I see you are keeping your weight up."

Here's the bad news: you can let your heart be troubled. Your heart can be affected by the news of the day. Your heart can be saddened by what you see on television or on the internet. Your heart can ache. Your heart can be broken. The heart, in this case, is obviously a metaphor. Nevertheless, we have the ability to have our hearts become broken, let down, saddened and troubled. When Jesus said, "Do not let your hearts be troubled" he knew, and so did the disciples, that it can, and will happen – whether it is the 1st century, when he said it, or the 21st century when we hear it – the truth is this: we can let our hearts be troubled.

Your actual physical heart is also affected by your emotional heart. If your emotional heart is troubled, your physical heart isn't doing too well either. Likewise, if your emotional heart is lifted up, your physical heart does well.

The "heart" is featured in the Hebrew Scriptures. Pharaoh's heart was "hardened" after each plague. King David called on God to give him a new heart. To clean his heart. To restore his heart. God spoke through the prophet Ezekiel a promise to remove one's heart of stone and to replace it with a heart of flesh. Jeremiah relayed a similar message in his oracle. This was the spiritual world in which the disciples grew up in.

Scripture calls us to have an open heart – to God, to God's message, to the people God sends our way. At the same time, we know that we need to guard our heart. For those who are good at guarding your heart, you may want to spend time considering how to open your heart more. For those who are good at opening your heart, you may want to spend time with those who are good at guarding it. I think our hearts are in a constant flux between being open and guarding, open and guarding, open and guarding – like a physical beating heart.

We need a heart of flesh to be able to love. But, to love means we can let our heart be broken. To forgive from the heart means for us to have a fleshy heart – we have to be open to our mistakes, own them, and ask for forgiveness. We are called to forgive as we have been forgiven. Forgiving is difficult for a guarded heart. An open heart can offer forgiveness.

Do not let your hearts be troubled... does that mean we have to have open hearts and guarded hearts too?

I mentioned I have some good news and some bad news. I've gone into (too far perhaps) into the bad news. Here's the good news: an open heart can be protected, or healed, with one word: believe. Jesus said: Do not let your hearts be troubled, believe... Believe in God. If you can't go that far yet, believe then in me. Believe the things you have seen me do, believe the words I am telling you. Don't let your hearts be troubled, BELIEVE.

"Believe" in Greek, and understood in Aramaic and in Hebrew, is an action word. It's not like this: I believe in the designated hitter; I believe the NFL should change their overtime rules to match the NCAA rules. That's not a biblical "believe" because it requires no action from the believer. Greek, in particular, would read grammatically incorrect in 21st century English; but, I'm going to do it anyway. Here it goes: *Let NOT your hearts be troubled, BELIEVING in God; believing in me.* [Capital letters stressing the emphasis in the phrase] Believing. It's an action verb. Believing in God – living into our faith – is what will keep our emotional and spiritual hearts from being troubled.

I have a friend, Marge Stapleton. The last meaningful conversation she and I had happened just after she turned 101 and a half. She was walking out of church and said she needed to talk with me. I sat down so I could see her eye to eye. She said this: I turned 100, and then 101, and, at this point, I can see myself turning 102. (She sighed) I buried two husbands. I buried a child. My eyesight is all but gone. My hearing is going; and to be honest, I wasn't sure if today was Tuesday or Sunday. They're telling me that's happening more and more, but I don't know it. (Sighed again, with tears welling up in her eyes. She then asked) How much longer...?

I let her question hang out there for a while. *How much longer?*

There were two sides of me that wanted to answer. The one side, I call the friend side, wanted to say this: For as long as you can. We need you. Although you can't see well at all, and are losing your hearing, you mean so much to me and to the rest of us. You're the oldest person we know. We don't want to you to go.

The other side is the pastor side. This is what I said: Are you ready?

She thought about it for a while. She said, "I know more people on that side than I do on this side. Most of my family is now on that side. I believe they are waiting for me. I believe that Jesus will reach out his arms and hold me. Yes, I am ready." She passed in July after a very short illness. She was ready.

I met Marge when she was 96. She told me that if I'm lucky I'll get invited to her 100th birthday which was going to be quite a party. A year later, during the worst of the pandemic; when Covid was taking people left and right and we didn't know quite how to save those with compromised immune systems and weakened lungs (both of which Marge had); Marge was one of two parishioners who became infected. She was in a plastic lung thing (which she hated) and became strong enough to be removed from it. She refused to be intubated. Her daughter, Jane, called. She said her mom was awake, but no one knew how long she had. I headed over to the hospital. Put on all the regalia required to enter her room. I walked in carrying a white stole in one hand and prayer book for Last Rites in the other. Marge's eyes lit up when she saw me. She then looked at

my hands and said, “Put that book away. I’m walking out of here.” And she did. I mean they wheeled her to the valet parking area and then she walked to her waiting car with Jane behind the wheel. Yeah, that’s Marge – “Put that book away...”

When she said she was ready, I began to get ready too.

She did in fact invite me to her 100th birthday. I had a speaking role so I dressed in black clericals and arrived early. I walked into the Bird Key Yacht Club and was surrounded by people I didn’t know. I thought I was at the wrong club. But then I heard Marge’s voice. She was sitting down and was encircled by all her Yacht Club friends. She called me over and I knew I was in the right place.

At church, when Marge said she was ready, I told her the following:

Here’s what we know – when it’s our time, someone will come and get us. It won’t be a stranger but someone that we know and trust. They will invite us to go somewhere. You can tell them to go away; or, you can choose to go with them. If you’re ready, when they show up, then go with them.

And, on July 11th, she did.

One last thing about Marge. Maybe it’s because of her age, maybe it’s because she’s had her heart broken, and restored, many times, but every time I was with Marge I had a feeling that everything was going to be okay. She had a presence about her that made me, and many others, feel comfortable in our hearts. She was the living and believing side of “Do not let your hearts be troubled.”

I think heaven will be a little like the Bird Key Yacht Club. But, you know, with pearly gates and the like. BKYC is on the edge of Sarasota and the bay. It’s an island that is a gateway to the Gulf and beyond. It’s a familiar and happy place. I bring this up not because of the physical layout of the facility, but because heaven will be full of people we don’t know. Yet, I *believing* that someone we know and love and trust will call our name and we’ll then know we are home.

Do not let your heart be troubled, believe.