

We live in an uncertain time. There is a national election coming up this week. If you pay attention to the advertisements, one side says you're a monster if you vote a particular way and you are a monster if you vote the other way; so, I guess we're all monsters. Nevertheless, a fair and free election has uncertainty at its core. Likewise, in our guest room closet at home, I have all of the vestments of the church. Why? Because I am uncertain about this hurricane season (and I don't trust the gulf right now). According to a story in the NY Times, there are eight thousand North Korean troops training in Russia with the apparent destination of Ukraine. That brings a whole big level of uncertainty to the world. Closer to home, I have been reading in the Bradenton Times and the Sarasota Herald about the uncertainty of this winter season – will people return, are we doomed, is there an exodus out of Florida? All I can say about that is whatever made Florida attractive is still here. But, the question is what do we do with uncertainty and spirituality.

The lessons for this Sunday all deal with uncertainty. The Wisdom of Solomon references the uncertainty of life after death (and suffering before we die). The author of the Book of Revelation, John of Patmos, lived with uncertainty – because he was in exile which meant the Roman guard could show up any time for imprisonment or execution – when he had his vision, or revelation. In his uncertain time he saw “A New Heaven and a New Earth” and God will be with the people and wipe away every tear from our eyes. The Gospel lesson shows the relationship between brother and sisters, Lazarus, Martha and Mary, and Jesus. They had an excellent mail delivery system back in those days. Martha and Mary sent Jesus a note telling him that Lazarus was sick and could die. Jesus was two miles away. But, he waited, and waited, to return. By the time he showed up, Lazarus had been dead for four days. Can you imagine in uncertainty that Martha and Mary felt when Jesus didn't arrive.

I don't like uncertainty. My personality type fights against yet; and yet, God called me to serve his Church which is one giant mystery. A year or two ago, I had a test run and was waiting for the doctor's results. I got a call on a Friday when I was out mowing the lawn. The message said to call my doctor. But, when I did, I had to leave him a message. Did I hear from him? No. All weekend I was fretting about what the news could be. On Monday, finally, I got a call back. He said, “Good news, everything looks fine.” I wanted to say, “Why didn't you just say that in a message on Friday!?” Sigh, uncertainty. What would I have learned about living with uncertainty if he had said that.

Biblically speaking, there are things we can do when living with uncertainty. The first is to name it – say out loud, or write it down, what you are feeling uncertain about. As soon as we can name it, uncertainty loses some of its power. Secondly, the prophets, Apostles, the saints all tell us to focus on what we can control and leave the rest up to the grace of God. They all lived in uncertain times. The way that they lived their lives, they taught us to give things to God in prayer.

Another way to live with uncertainty is to focus on the facts. As far as the uncertainty about weather and Florida, let's look at the facts – Longboat is a special community. There is not

another one around like it. It's a barrier island and from time to time we get storms that do damage. We don't get hit every year, and it's been a long time since something like this has happened, but it has happened before. My brain does not like to focus on facts when it wakes up at 3 a.m. But, for me, the key is to focus on facts – on what I know and to not let my brain imagine all sorts of scary things.

When we live in uncertain times, we should consider focusing on healthy comfort practices. Eating a stick of butter is an unhealthy comfort practice; focus on the healthy ones. When I get a hug from my wife, I just know that things are going to be okay. We have a healthy comfort practice. Find what your healthy comfort practices are and do them during times of uncertainty.

The last Biblical consideration is to look at the entirety of the 66 books. The first book, Genesis, begins with the earth being a dark, formless void and chaos was over the waters. God sent God's spirit over the waters and said, "Let there be light." The next chapter, God takes afternoon walks with Adam and Eve. I imagine they are walking on a white sandy beach like the ones we have on Longboat. What starts with chaos and darkness concludes with God and humans walking together in nature. The last book of the Bible, Revelation, highlights the reunification of God and God's people. It shows a loving supporting, in-person relationship where God wipes away tears from our eyes. We are told there will be no pain, no sorrow, and no death. The stories in between show separation and uncertainty, pain and sorrow; but, the beginning and the end show peace and unity. Even in these uncertain times, that is where we are headed. In the meantime, we are called to name our uncertainties, to distinguish between those things that we can do and the things that only God can do, to do those healthy comfort practices which will help us bring comfort and compassion to ourselves and others and to hold onto the vision of future where there is no pain or sorrow, rather there will be peace and love and joy.
In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.