

GUARD YOUR HEARTS: WITH GOD'S COMFORT

Sermon written by Martha-Jean Fitch

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TEXT: various passages from John 14

How many of you like to fly on airplanes? Some of you, looks like. I know that there are some among us that would much rather drive or take a train than be in an airplane due to whatever fears they have. And others have to take some sort of anti-anxiety pill to actually get on to a plane.

Greg and I really enjoy flying – however we have had some “white knuckle” times while flying. Have you ever hit some really rough turbulence while on an airplane flight? I remember flying between Dallas, TX, and Denver, CO, years ago and hitting by far the worst turbulence I’ve ever experienced.

We were flying through a thunderstorm as we left Dallas, and the currents began to toss the plane all over the place. Most of the people in the plane were panicking. There were a lot of gasps and even some screams. Both of us were holding on tightly to the arms of the seats as we bounced around and felt ourselves pulling against the seat belts that kept us from coming out of our seats.

The pilot came on the intercom and in a calm voice said, “Hello, this is your captain, we are encountering some turbulence.” You think? Then he told us that he was in the process of flying the plane higher above the storm. At one point the plane must have hit some kind of vacuum or something because it seemed to just drop a couple of hundred feet. Boy did that make our stomachs roll! The turbulence did not immediately stop. But within ten minutes everything settled down and the flight smoothed out. We had to trust that pilot during that time of disturbance.

As it turned out he knew exactly what he was doing and got us to our destination safe and sound. And the flight was much better once we rose above the storm.

Our world seems to be going through a lot of turbulence these days – with our economic struggles and wars and all of the political wrangling – not to mention all the concerns that still seem to be lingering about COVID and other health issues. And in the midst of these - it just may be that you yourself are experiencing your own storm and turbulence. Perhaps you have experienced the rattling of losing a loved one or the shaking of health concerns or an unexpected diagnosis and you don’t know what the future will bring. For others a turbulence might be financial fears, relationship struggles or some great challenge or temptation. Sometimes if it’s not one thing, it’s another. Are you feeling some of that turbulence in your life? What would Jesus, your Pilot, say to you as you face that turbulence in your life? I believe Jesus has a word of comfort and peace to calm our troubled hearts – much like He said to His original 12 disciples during His last supper with them.

As the 13th chapter of John begins, we see that the disciples gathered with Jesus in the upper room to celebrate the Passover. The meal begins with the unexpected gift of love and service of Jesus washing their feet. But then they could tell that Jesus was deeply troubled and He announced to them that one of them was going to betray Him - and then Jesus predicts that Peter would deny Him – and of all things, He says that He is leaving soon...and that they couldn't go with Him but will follow Him later.

Now just imagine how the disciples felt at this point! Maybe like Greg and I felt like on that airplane! Turbulence! Troubled, confused, unsettled and fearful – not knowing what was going to happen.

And Jesus knows all that – knowing exactly what was on their hearts, the questions, and the fears. So, He assures them with His presence, His promises, and His peace.... words that can guard and uplift *our* hearts as well.

John 14 begins with Jesus saying:

“¹Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me. ²There is more than enough room in my Father's home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? ³When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am. ⁴And you know the way to where I am going.”

⁵“No, we don't know, Lord,” Thomas said. “We have no idea where you are going, so how can we know the way?” ⁶Jesus told him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me. ⁷If you had really known me, you would know who my Father is. From now on, you do know him and have seen him!”

¹⁵“If you love me, obey my commandments. ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you. ¹⁷He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth. The world cannot receive Him because it isn't looking for Him and doesn't recognize him. But you know Him because He lives with you now and later will be in you.

²⁵I am telling you these things now while I am still with you. ²⁶But when the Father sends the Advocate as my representative—that is, the Holy Spirit—He will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you. ²⁷“I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid.

I wonder if there is someone who needs to be comforted here today with these words? I know there must be. We all have lost loved ones. People have lost dreams or had relationships break. Some are discouraged or depressed, lonely, or anxious. We all have had troubled hearts from time to time. Jesus' words offer a prescription for a troubled heart – and these words all revolve around trusting in God – our hope and help.

Jesus says, “Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. Trust in God; trust also in me.” The best cure for a troubled heart is to trust His presence. He is always with us

—which means we never have to face anything alone. We don't have to be troubled or afraid — when we are trusting in God to carry us through the storms of life.

We can really become troubled when we stop trusting in the Lord and start leaning on our own understanding, can't we? We can get ourselves into a lot of turbulence when we insist on figuring it all out. What's important is that we are trusting in God alone. Proverbs 3:5-6 says, *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight."*

We can depend on Jesus to lead us in the right direction because He is the Way and the Truth and the Life. He is trustworthy!

I have discovered that these words of Jesus can really help you when you are feeling troubled. Recently when I have started to feel anxious or even frustrated — I have been repeating that verse, "Let not your heart be troubled — trust in Jesus." And all of the sudden my heart is calmed, and I have been more focused on trusting God to show me the right way to think and act. I need that reminder — God is with me, and I don't have to be anxious or afraid. It's been said, "When we allow our heart to be troubled, we are allowing circumstances to be bigger than the God we serve." But the truth is God is bigger than anything we have to face! We do not have to be afraid for God is with us and for us and will never abandon us.

We can guard our hearts in times of trouble by trusting God's presence — and also by trusting God's promises. When everything seems dark and gloomy, when everything seems to be falling apart — remember God's promises. The greatest defense against the worries and troubles of this life is to flood your heart with the promises of God. The word of God has power. For that power to be active in our lives, we have to actually know the Word. Try memorizing a few verses and speaking them aloud. In those moments of trouble and worry, you'll be ready to renew your heart by speaking Scripture to yourself. It's been said that we need to "preach to our pain" — let God's word wash over all our troubles and give us hope.

One of the great promises from John 14 is that Jesus has gone to prepare a place for us that where He is, thereby, we may be also. Jesus is making arrangements for us — and when everything is ready, He will come and take us home to be with Him forever.

What comfort this gives us as we think of life and death. There is a place in heaven for us. And that Jesus Himself will take us home to be with Him when we die. And what comfort that gives us as we mourn the loss of someone we have loved. We can know that as they took their last breath here on earth — their next breath was in their heavenly home that Jesus had prepared personally for them. And that they are right now in the loving presence and everlasting arms of Jesus — with no more suffering and no more pain.

The great promise we can cling, for all of us who remain, is that there will never be a time when we are apart from Jesus. Paul tells us in the book of Romans that nothing will ever be able to separate us from the love of Jesus — not even death itself. We don't have to be troubled because Jesus is alive — and will be by our side throughout our lives — and will take us one day to our heavenly home which He has lovingly prepared for us. What a wonderful promise!

One more comfort for our troubled souls is to trust in the peace we know through the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said that God would give us a gift of an Advocate, or some versions call Him the Helper or the Comforter. In the original Greek language, the word is Paraclete, which means the one called alongside to help. “The word is actually a warrior’s term. Greek soldiers went into battle in pairs, so when the enemy attacked, they could draw together back-to-back, covering each other’s blind side. One’s battle partner was called the paraclete.” In the same way, our Lord does not send us to fight the good fight alone. The Holy Spirit is our battle partner who covers our blind side and fight for our well-being.”¹ The Holy Spirit will help us and teach us and will remind us of everything Jesus has said....and will give us the gift of peace.

That is the great gift Jesus gives us – a peace different than that what the world gives – but a peace that passes all understanding – keeping our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. The peace the world gives is the peace that occurs when there is no war or conflict, the one people experience when everything looks good. But the peace of God does not depend on our situations.

The peace the Holy Spirit gives is an inner peace – knowing God is at work in us and will help us through whatever we are going through. And that peace will guard our hearts and our minds - and we won’t have to be troubled or afraid.

Psalms 23:4 says, “*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.*” The troubles are there but they have been overshadowed by the peace of God. What an incredible gift God has given us!

You know, preacher and author Max Lucado had his own experience of turbulence on a plane one time. He tells the story of the time he boarded the plane, the pilot called his name. He was standing in the cockpit entrance, greeting passengers.

“Well, hello, Max.” Max looked up and saw it was his old friend Joe. Max called him the Methuselah of the airways. He’s been flying forever. He flew transports in Vietnam and has logged a book full of hours as a commercial pilot. He’s faced every flight crisis from electrical storms to empty fuel tanks. He is a good pilot. And he is a friend, a good friend.

They chatted for a few minutes, and Max went to his seat with a sense of assurance. “What more could I request?” Max thought. The pilot is experienced and proven. Even more, he is my tried-and-true friend. I am in good hands.”

The knowledge came in handy. An hour into the flight they hit a wall of winds. People gasped, dentures rattled, and the attendant told us to check our seat belts and rosary beads. Max said he’d had smoother roller coaster rides. Unlike the other passengers, however, Max stayed calm. You see, Max had an advantage. He knew the pilot. He knew Joe. He knew his heart and trusted his skill. Joe can handle this, He told himself. The storm was bad, but the pilot was good. So as much as one can relax in a squall, Max did. In fact, he was really at peace.

Joe the pilot got them through the storm just fine. He landed the plane and stood in his cockpit door as Max exited the flight. “Got a bit choppy there, Joe,” Max said. “Yeah,” Joe agreed. “Were you scared?” “Not really,” Max said. “Everything changes when you know the pilot.”²

Friends – do you know the pilot? Draw near to Him – our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. You will find comfort as you trust in His presence, His promises, and His peace.

PRAYER/INVITATION

RESOURCES

¹C. Philip Green, “*Cure for Troubled Hearts*”, www.sermoncentral.com

²Max Lucado, *You Are Good, from “Before Amen”*

<https://agmbiblicalcounseling.com/2016/06/09/everything-changes-when-you-know-the-pilot/>