

“Saying Goodbye”

John 14:1-14

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May 25, 2008

If you knew you were going to die tomorrow, what would you say to your dearest friends and family members tonight? It appears Jesus faced this daunting challenge as he concluded his earthly ministry.

He gathered with his disciples in the Upper Room the night of his arrest to prepare them for what was coming. It was going to be ugly and he knew it. All of them would go through the valley of the shadow of death and face unspeakable horror. What could he say that would help them through this experience?

He began by telling them the truth, even though it hurt. “My children, I will be with you only a little longer” John 13:33. Peter, obviously disturbed, inquired as to where Jesus was going so he could accompany him. To his dismay, Jesus told Peter that he could not follow him because he would deny him. “I tell you the truth,” Jesus said, “before the rooster crows you will disown me three times” John 13:38.

Jesus had no trouble reading their facial expressions and knew what they needed to hear in this dark hour. “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you may be where I am” John 14:1-3.

I’m sure it is no surprise to you that the disciples began asking questions and a dialogue ensued. The remainder of John 14 is a beautiful farewell discourse filled with honesty, comfort, hope and love. Jesus encouraged them to love one another, not lose faith in him and keep his commandments. He even told them that his leaving was to their advantage because the Holy Spirit would come and reside in their hearts, helping them to carry out his challenge to them. He concluded with those soothing words, “Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” John 14:27.

This text raised three questions for me last week that I wish to share with you on this Memorial Day weekend.

Who needs to be prepared for changes you see coming? Jesus knew that his death was imminent. His words and actions threatened the religious leaders and the likelihood of surviving this Passover was slim. Previous attempts on his life had failed, but this time would be different. Judas had already left the fellowship around the tables in the Upper Room and gone to find those who were looking for Jesus. It would not be long before he would be apprehended and crucified. So what did Jesus do? He spent his final hours as a free man preparing his disciples for what was to come.

One of the most loving things you can do for others is to help them see changes that are looming on the horizon. Never assume they see or know what you do. Prepare them so they will not be caught off guard. Be honest and truthful even when it is painful.

Chances are they will ask a lot of questions. Thomas, Philip and Judas (not the betrayer) did. This is normal. Fear and confusion lead to questions, not all of which can be answered to

others' satisfaction. That's all right. Don't let difficult questions keep you from telling people what they need to know.

Who did this for you? Who prepared you for some difficult changes? What difference did it make?

Who needs you to be this transparent and honest with them now? How difficult will this be for you? Ask God to help you. He helped Jesus. He will help you, too.

Where do you need to be the “non-anxious presence” in the room? Dutch priest and author, Henri Nouwen, coined this phrase and used it to describe the person that keeps his head when all others are losing theirs. Jesus was that person.

I marvel at the peace and calm Jesus exhibited that night in the Upper Room. You know he had to be under great stress. How could he think of them and be calm with so much on his mind? He knew how important it was. They needed him to stay calm and, with God's help, he did.

Who modeled this for you? Who kept his or her head when others were losing theirs? Why do you think they did it? What difference did it make? What did you learn?

Who needs you to be the “non-anxious presence” in the room? Among others, I believe God does. He knows what a difference one person can make in a crisis. I hope you will let Him help you.

How could you give hope to someone in despair? How did Jesus? He let them know that the horrible experience they were getting ready to go through would not have the final word in their lives. God would and that word would be a good one. Good would overcome evil and Jesus would return to them and fill their hearts with confidence and hope. The peace he spoke about would become reality through the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit in their hearts.

Who do you know that needs this kind of encouragement? How could you minister to them? I'll share one of the opportunities that came my way last week.

One of our dearest members, Edith Henderson, had a stroke a few days ago. It was severe and left her with a lot of challenges. Only time will tell if she can overcome them.

On Monday morning, the nurses called her daughter, Diane, to come to the hospital. “She is very restless and asking for you.” When Edith saw Diane and held her hand, she immediately calmed down and went to sleep. She slept the rest of the morning. Diane's presence made all the difference in the world to Edith.

When Diane told me this story, I told her that something similar may occur very soon. “Your mother may not survive this stroke. It will be all right, though,” I said, “because the Lord will come into your mother's room, take her by the hand and calm her down. He will gently pick her up and carry her home to be with him and the rest of your family that has gone before her. What you did for your mother this morning, he will do when that time comes. You can trust him.”

Trust me, John 14 works. Troubled hearts can be calmed. I hope you let the Lord calm yours this morning and then you will share your story with those that need to hear it this week.