

“Trouble”  
Acts 16:9-15;  
Revelation 21:22-22:5; John 14:23-29

Pastor Norman Fowler  
First Presbyterian Church of Moscow  
May 9, 2010

Ed mentioned the ups and downs of life a bit, that there are certain troubles. I have to admit that when I think of the word “trouble” there’s a song that comes to mind. It comes out of a musical, and a piece of it goes “We’ve got trouble right here in River City, with a capital T, that rhymes with P, that stands for pool.” Then it goes on “Trouble, trouble, trouble...” I’d really get myself in trouble if I tried to do much more. But in that particular song out of the Music Man, the lead character is trying to convince these folks that there’s something bad about a pool table coming to town.

Now, there are two things going on around trouble. One is an event, and it’s clear that sometimes events in our lives are troubling. I’m not sure a pool table is an important troubling event, but we certainly have experienced events in our lives that are troubling—illnesses, accidents, people’s decisions—all kinds of things that happen that we recognize as trouble.

The other side of that, however, is the idea of feeling troubled. He was not only trying to say the event was troubling, but he was trying to stir up that sense of trouble in their lives, make them fearful, worried. When I think about that, I think that’s what Jesus is talking about when he says, “Don’t let your hearts be troubled.” You see, that word can also be translated “shaken.” Think about being shaken. It’s a way of thinking about how hard it is. Something happens and we can then be afraid, so the two go together, to be shaken and afraid.

How do we not be shaken or afraid? Aren’t there particular events in our lives that we are going to struggle with? I don’t think Jesus is saying that there won’t be those troubling events. It’s more in how we are able to respond to those events, and that’s where I think we can go back to the beginning of this passage and think about how we can respond. What help does he give us to show us, to lead us?

Initially he tells us, “Those who love me will keep my word.” He’s inviting us to recognize the love that God has given us and to respond to it with love. Now, somebody saying “love me” seems a little narcissistic, but if we think about what he’s saying, he’s saying, “Look and see the value and worth of who I am and what I am for you, and care, and then do.” Follow my words. It is an offer for us to recognize that there’s away for us as we recognize God’s love and return it and then do what Jesus encourages us to do.

He says when we do that other things happen as well. God comes and lives with us, makes his home with us. It’s like opening the door of our home and letting God in and finding how wonderful it is to be at home with God. And he goes on to talk about the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, the one coming to help us by teaching and reminder. I certainly recognize in my own life that I need both a lot of teaching and a lot of reminding. There are events in my life that I need to figure out and there are times that I know what the right thing to do is, but I need the reminder.

It’s after Jesus has given us all of this that he says, “My peace I give you. Not as the world gives, but as I give.” That’s interesting. What kind of peace does the world give us?

Often times when I think about peace, what the world tells me is that peace is just the absence of conflict. It's that moment when I get to rest. Anybody who has tried to rest for long periods of time realizes eventually you have to get up and do something. That feels to me that's the image the world gives us—just those moments of rest, moments of lack of conflict. If it goes on too long, it's boring. After all, who would read a book if the same thing happened on every page, there was no tension. I don't think that's the peace Christ gives us. I don't think the peace Christ is offering us is boring. Following his words, letting God into our lives, letting the Spirit guide us is not boring.

One reason I thought about it was the very word "peace" which means harmony, or another way of thinking about it is balance. Does anybody know what this is? It's called a balance board, and you stand on it and try to balance. You see, I think that the peace God gives us is a lot more like standing on a balance board. You can't really stand still. It's very hard because you are always reacting or over-reacting and you have to go back and forth. Now, you can stop. Then you're not balancing any more. You're not using the board for its given purpose. It's like life. We can stop. But to live life takes work. It is balancing.

You see, I think that's the peace Christ gives us. It's that dynamic equilibrium. It's where we recognize that we need to be balanced. We have to center ourselves around the fulcrum or the center. I think it is like our lives. When we center around Christ and do what he says, he's giving us the tools to balance, to recognize when one side of our life is going down, we can see other parts of life to help us counteract and balance. There are ways in which that's what the Spirit helps us to do. It teaches us, it helps us see, at the moment when we're feeling off balance, to go a little different direction, then we can balance again.

I think the life with Christ, the life of faith, is a dynamic equilibrium. It's dynamic, but it's peace. There's a way in which, when we're centered, even though things are moving back and forth, we recognize where we're at. That center allows us to do what we need to do to live life. It does change us. If you stay on the balance board too long, you get tired, but you will also build muscles. You will change the way you are. And so it is that life with Christ changes who we are, changes the way things are.

In Acts, we heard that Lydia, when she heard the good news, changed. She became more hospitable. Immediately, she opened her home to those folks. She opened herself to hospitality. Last week I suggested that one of the things Christ invites us to do is to love one another and to do that is to be an invitation, an invitation to know this life of wonder, this balanced life we have when we're centered on Christ. Hospitality is one set of muscles that grows from living Christ's peace.

Revelation tells us there is also the healing of the nations. It's as we're centered in Christ that there becomes more balance in all of our lives. As we are able to balance, as we allow the Spirit to work, as we hear Christ lead us, we become more at peace. One element of our peace is knowing that God reigns forever, as Revelation says. His kingdom goes on forever. It's not just a hope for today, but a hope for every tomorrow. That's one of the things that lets us, when one thing or another gets us down, respond and balance again, become centered again. So we are invited to the balance of faith that enables us to face all our troubles. Our hearts need not be shaken or afraid. Amen.