

May 10, 2020 Easter 5A

John 14:1-14

Safe at Home: An Incredible Journey



Is everyone spending enough time at home these days? I vividly remember a movie I watched as a young child call *The Incredible Journey*. It tells the story of three pets as they travel 300 miles through the Canadian wilderness trying to return to their home and their family. It shows the suffering and stress of an arduous journey, together with the unwavering loyalty and courage of the three animals. The animals' owners, the Hunters, leave to go to England for several months because Jim, the father, is scheduled to give a series of university lectures there. They leave their pets in the care of John Longridge, a family friend. One day, after John Longridge leaves for a two-week duck hunting trip, the animals, feeling the lack of their human helpers, set out to try to find their owners, the Hunters. Mrs. Oakes, who is taking care of Longridges' home, does not find the animals and thinks that John must have taken them with him. The animals follow their instincts and head west, towards home, 300 miles away through the Canadian wilderness. They face many obstacles in their path; from rivers to irritable people, but nonetheless, they struggle bravely on, until they finally reach home.

I remember being fascinated by the adventure and the scenery and the relationships between the animals and all the challenges they faced together. It would spawn a whole genre of stories about animals making their way back home.

As I got older, my early teen years, I became fascinated with another type of adventure story. These weren't the adventures of finding your way home, but the adventures that happened when you left home—stories like *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *The Hobbit*, and others. In the stories the Adventures happened when you got away from home.

I think about these things today because Jesus' words in our Gospel lesson seem to have hints of adventure in them—a journey, a destination, companionship along the way. But to me, today's Gospel much more resembles *The Incredible Journey*—the adventure that happens as your find your way home. Let's look at Jesus' words.

John 14:1 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me."

Just prior to this, Jesus has told them He is going way and they can't come. They are facing the unknown, the new, the different. And they are not doing very well with those things.

I don't know if any of you have been watching "The Chosen." It is a somewhat fictionalized view of the life of Jesus that makes some great points. There is a fascinating scene in episode #8 where Peter is complaining to Jesus about having called Matthew the Tax Collector to become part of His band of disciples. As Peter is protesting, Jesus reminds Peter that he wasn't an obvious choice to be a disciple either. Peter responds, "But that's different. Matthew is a *tax collector*." To which Jesus turns to Peter and says, "Get used to different." Get used to different. I understand someone has even made that into a t-shirt. I need to find one of those. Get used to different.

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me."

I think about our world today. I think about the people I talk to here locally and in other parts of the country. I hear reports from other parts of the world. When have so many people, everywhere, felt so uncertain, had so many unanswered and unanswerable questions all at the same time? When have so many plans been upended, suspended? When have so many guidelines been provisional, temporary, subject to revision? How long will this last? When will we get to go out/gather/travel/work normally/work at all/hug/feel safe again? Grief, illness, this unseen virus with its terrible tentacles that reach into our homes, churches, schools, hospitals, economy all leave us feeling unmoored, untethered, adrift, even more than we often do as humans.

Get used to different.

In our Gospel reading, Jesus is talking to people with troubled hearts. He's talking the future-- about taking them home to a place He has prepared. He's talking about the present--He's talking about the trials and adventures they (and we) face on the way home to the place He's prepared.

Listen to some of the words again:

John 14:2-4 My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. ⁴ You know the way to the place where I am going."

I want to pull 2 things out of this for us to keep in our minds and in our troubled hearts as we face the unknowns, the different, the trials, the adventures that we are facing right now.

The first: Jesus is with us!

"I will come back and take you to be **with me** that you may be where I am." With me. This has to be one of Jesus's favorite phrases. Look at how often He uses it.

Matthew 18:20 **For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them."**

To the thief on the cross in Luke 23:43 Jesus answered him, **"Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."**

And when He gave us the Great commission to be disciple-makers in Matthew 28: **"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely (the KJV translated 'surely' as 'lo'—like 'lo and behold'—it means 'listen up. Something good is coming!') I am with you always, to the very end of the age."**

And today—"I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."

Jesus wants to be with us! Jesus wants us with Him! Just ponder that one a minute. Jesus knows you at your very worst. Jesus knows stuff about you that would cause you to run away in tears if it became public. He knows all that and He wants you with Him. He wants you so bad that when it took His own brutal death to accomplish that, He did it with joy. Remember what the writer to the Hebrews says: "Who for the joy set before Him, endured the cross." We were the joy. Having us with Him was the joy that led Jesus to the cross. He wants us with him. Do you remember the words that come right before "who for the joy set before Him?" They are "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith." Jesus us with us. Let's fix our eyes (and our troubled hearts) on Jesus.

So point 1 for us to keep in our minds and our troubled hearts as we face the unknowns, the different, the trials, the adventures that we are facing right now—**Jesus is with us!**

Point 2—We have Hope!

Now we spent all of last discipleship year on **Being a Voice of Hope** in our community and mission fields. And right now, God continues to provide countless opportunities for us to continue to be a voice of hope. Seriously, God has put them right in front of us. With all the uncertainty in our world, with all the unanswered questions, with all the unknown, with all the different, God is just teeing it up for us and saying “take a swing”—be a voice of Hope.

So a little review about hope. The Bible doesn't use the word hope the way we do. We use hope to express uncertainty: I hope it doesn't rain. I hope the Shelter in Place order ends soon. I hope we can see each other soon. Those are all uncertain.

Hope expresses a future certainty—something God has promised that hasn't happened it. Another way to say it is that hope is what we do while we wait for God to keep His promise.

Now listen to the promise. Listen to the Hope:

John 14:2-3 **My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.**

That's our certain future. That is our hope. We will get there. Jesus will keep His promise and take us home. But getting there will be an adventure. We will face trials and obstacles and obstructions and disruptions. 2 things we take with us on the journey:

Faith is Jesus—He is with us.

Hope—He will do what He says He will do.

And we live by that faith and give voice to that hope.

In the name of Jesus, Amen and Amen.

Pastor Bill Hugo Easter 2020

Known by **LOVE**

Live by **FAITH**

Voice of **HOPE**