

PEACE
John 14:1-6, 27

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First Baptist Church
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Second Sunday of Advent

I read that Dr. Phil had the following advice for how to find inner peace. Dr. Phil proclaimed, “The way to achieve inner peace is to finish all the things you have started but never finished.” Hmm.

One of his faithful viewers took the doctor’s advice to heart. She wrote, “So I looked around my house to see all the things I started and hadn’t finished, and before leaving the house this morning, I finished off a a bottle of Bailey’s Irish Cream, a package of Oreos, the remainder of my old Prozac prescription, the rest of the cheesecake, some Doritos, and a box of chocolates. My slacks are a bit tight around the waist at the moment, but you have no idea how incredibly good I am feeling right now! Dr. Phil was definitely right.” Finish what you start. Inner peace comes from finishing all the things you have started.

But Jesus says peace is a gift.

“Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives, do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.” John 14:27

Edie Postill Cole, when she was a little girl, used to ask her mother, “Is it Saturday morning?”

“Yes, it’s Saturday morning – and yes, Daddy will be home today,” her mother would say with a smile.

“Oh, goody! Can we go meet him?”

“It’s pretty cold. We’ll see what it’s like later.”

This same conversation took place many times in years gone by when Edie was a little girl. She remembers:

We lived in a small village eight miles from the farm, close to my sister’s school. My father drove to the farm in the warm, lazy days of summer. But once rains and snow came, he had to walk back and forth.

Monday mornings were always sad as we watched our daddy sling a gunny sack full of groceries over his shoulder and trudge off to the farm. We would stand at the front window and watch him get farther and farther away. It wasn’t until he disappeared over the hill that we slowly returned to the day’s activities.

The week would drag by, but then it was Saturday and all our gloom vanished! Daddy would be home today!

My sister and I loved to meet him along the way. All day we would wait for our mother to decide if we could. If it wasn't too cold, she would bundle us up in our warmest clothes. A wool scarf encircled my head with only a small slit left so I could peer out at the snowy world around us.

My heart raced as we started on our hike. My stubby legs could hardly maneuver in the deep snowdrifts. I clung to my big sister's hand, and she encouraged me and pulled me along with her.

East of our village was a fairly steep hill – Kelly's Hill. We would struggle to the top, huffing and puffing, spurred on by the thought of whom we hoped to see once we reached the top.

"Can you see him?" I asked anxiously as we crested the hill.

"Not yet," Doreen replied, searching the horizon.

Finally we could make out the form of one lone figure plodding along in the distance.

"It's him! It's him!" I shouted, jumping up and down in the snow. When the figure got closer, we'd start to run. Daddy would spot us, and he'd start to run. He would open his huge arms and both of us would leap into them, laughing and squealing as he hugged and kissed us – one more joyous reunion.

My father, mother, and sister are in heaven now – Edie writes – and when I envision my own arrival there, I think about those Saturday mornings on Kelly's Hill. This time, Jesus will run to meet me first – and I will leap into His open arms, laughing and basking in His love. Then my family will spot me and they'll rush toward me with arms wide open. What a joyous reunion! And this time, there will be no more [Monday] good-byes. (Edie Postill Cole, "Kelly's Hill," *Stories For the Families Heart*, ed. Alice Gray, p. 209)

Jesus is saying good-bye in our text this morning. He and His disciples are in the Upper Room. The betrayer, the one for whom Jesus dipped the morsel and gave it to him, has left. With the exit of Judas, Jesus now begins to teach the truths of the Upper Room.

The moment that all of history had hoped for was coming. Calvary was around the corner.

In John 13:36, Jesus is telling His disciples that He is going away. Going away?! They had left everything to follow Him. They had left jobs. They had left families. They had left a way of life to become disciples of the travelling rabbi who would teach them. Going away! He couldn't go away.

He had spoken of going away on another occasion, in John 8:21. There, His enemies were mystified and wondered if He was contemplating suicide. Now, at this moment, in the intimacy of His inner circle, the disciples were equally puzzled. The disciples were disturbed at such discussion.

He told them that He was going where they could not go, but a little while later they would follow. Their hearts were aching. Their hearts were troubled. Their very lives were about to be cast into the midst of swirling turmoil.

“What does He mean that He’s going away and we can only follow at a later time?”

So, in John 14:1, Jesus begins: “Stop being troubled. Set your heart at ease.”

Jesus knew what it was like in heaven. Have you ever noticed that Jesus doesn’t speak of heaven in the language of supposing? Rather, He speaks of heaven in the language of knowing. “Put your hearts at ease because my Father has a large house, a large home, and there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, I would have told you. I’m going to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; so that where I am there you may also be.”

Jesus is not speculating about a future life. Rather, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords speaks as one who was familiar with the territory – just like someone might know their own home town. He had a reason that He had to leave. The purpose of His departure was to make ready a place where He could welcome them permanently. Certainly, He assures them, He would not go and prepare for friends unless He expected they would finally arrive. And even though He was well aware of their weakness and their impending failure, He took the responsibility of bringing them to the Father’s house.

Just as Jesus was thinking about Heaven, they were thinking about earth.

I. We think about earthly things while Jesus focuses on heaven.

We’re often like those disciples – we don’t like to think about heaven very much. At least, we don’t think about heaven very much. Rather, some of us still live under the delusion that, somehow, earth will make us happy, that there are things here that we can strive for – something that we can reach out and grasp that will actually make us happy right here and right now.

As New Testament scholar D. A. Carson wrote, “We’re not ‘homesick for heaven’ as were Christians in the past. We aren’t hungry or sick or poor or persecuted enough [here in our culture] to look toward a future life when this one is pretty good. We plan to go to heaven someday, of course. We just don’t want to think about it right now.” (D.A. Carson, “Dying Without Heaven or Hell,” *Moody*, May/June 2001, p. 12-15)

That certainly wasn’t the attitude of Jesus or the apostle Paul. You remember, they were not really citizens of this world, but they were citizens of a different, future kingdom.

One writer has said that our sense of beauty, glory, wonder, awe, magnificence and triumph – those thoughts about heaven have shrunk into the image of heaven as being something joyless. In fact, *Time Magazine* did an article in which it was discussed that pastors rarely ever preach about heaven any more. David Wells, a theology professor at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, noted, “We would expect to hear news of heaven from Evangelical churches, but I don’t hear it at all.” (David Van Biema, “Does Heaven Exist,” *Time*, March 24, 1997)

Jesus was not at all tentative to talk about the world to come. The first words of this preacher were, “Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand.”

Actually, in many churches the only time you ever hear the word “heaven” is the time that it is tucked away in old hymns, preserved like a bug in amber.

Heaven has seemingly disappeared. We’re not homesick for heaven anymore because we’re happy right here and right now.

My sister Jaye has a daughter named Logan. When Logan was four, my sister, her husband, Ralph, and Logan were at a restaurant with some of their friends in Greenville, South Carolina. Their friends’ five-year-old daughter named Bailey likes to say the blessing – she gives some pretty intense theological blessings for a preschooler. During her blessing, Bailey said, “Now Lord, when we die, take us to heaven. We’ll leave this world and go to the world beyond.”

My four-year-old niece, Logan, got very, very quiet. Then she started crying. When they asked Logan what was wrong, in response to the five-year-old’s prayer, Logan said, “I don’t want to go to heaven. I don’t want to leave this world and go to the world beyond. I don’t want to leave my stuff.”

I’m afraid that Logan, in her four-year-old mind, didn’t know better than to be honest with her feelings. And many of us have those same feeling.

C. S. Lewis said, “Our Father refreshes us on the journey with some pleasant inns, but will not encourage us to mistake them for home.” (C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*)

So when the Jewish rabbi by the name of Jesus is unhappy here on earth and He talks about a heavenly home, talks about mansions with His Father – that’s okay. But many of us are quite happy right here and right now. Somehow we’re still convinced that the pleasures of earth, the achievements of the moment, will be able to fulfill our dreams. Perhaps we’re young and strong and it seems as if life here will never end, never be sad. So we’re happy – happy with our toes in the clay.

When are our sights lifted? When do we begin to look toward our heavenly home?

II. Our sights are lifted when brokenness comes to visit.

For you see, brokenness is coming to visit Jesus here in the text. Throughout the gospels, Jesus is marching toward Calvary. He is marching toward Jerusalem, to that moment when those nails will pierce His hands, the thorns will pierce His brow, and the spear will pierce His side. Throughout the gospels, He's making His way to the cross.

And yet it's so strange. The disciples keep thinking about earthly things. Jesus is thinking about the eternal, and they are thinking about the earth. Jesus is thinking about the cosmic, and they're thinking about this world and this place.

You see, the difference in the Gospels between Jesus and His disciples is that the sights of Jesus are lifted, but the sights of the disciples are still on earth.

Jesus' call for His disciples throughout His journey toward Jerusalem, His journey toward the cross, is this: "Lift your sights. Stop thinking about the here and the now and start thinking about the hereafter."

III. The "here and now," this passing world, is important only inasmuch as it has a bearing on the hereafter.

You think about this statement philosophically and theologically. This world counts only inasmuch as it impacts our existence in the eternal realm.

This is not where it is, folks. You can grab for more. You can be like the fool in scripture who built bigger and bigger barns. But tomorrow, you die.

May I translate that for you? After several health issues and reaching almost nine decades of age, the owner realizes that none of it is worth holding on to. Manmade possessions, even a Panhandle paradise, have no luster when you're about to step into the next world.

Jesus had a real sense that this earth was so full of evil, so full of the enemy, that it really wasn't His home. It was just a pilgrimage through the woods to our real destination of being home with the Father. The journey took Him through the suffering of Calvary, but the end of the journey was home in heaven with the Father.

Indeed, our own journeys, our own pilgrimages, will take us to the eternal Kingdom of God. And sometimes – no, all the time – that journey leads through Jerusalem. Through Calvary. Through suffering.

"Think about heaven," Jesus said to His disciples. "Don't be troubled. Stop worrying. I'm going. And I'm coming back. And you'll be there with me."

Heaven is our life's end. Our journey's gold. The rich repository of every single spiritual investment we make down here on earth.

Our sights are lifted when we have to go through Jerusalem – when we find ourselves, like Jesus, facing a broken body. Then we think about a new body, one that has hands that work and feet that walk.

We think about heaven when we have a broken home. When we shed those tears, we want to go to a place where there is no more sorrow, no more pain, where the eyes are forever wiped dry.

Some of you realize that earth can't keep its promises. It's all a mirage here, and nothing is real. Your sights are lifted, perhaps, when death comes to your home for the first time, when someone you really love is gone from this life forever. Then your sights are lifted to eternity with them.

When you see a child with a disability, and you realize that disability is permanent, your sights are lifted. This can't be the best place.

Our hardships have a way of driving us in deeper and up higher into the heart of God.

You see, heaven is not something for later. Heaven is our hope right now. **Vance Havener used to say, "The hope of dying is the only thing that keeps me alive.**

Stop letting your hearts be troubled. You have believed in God. Now believe in Me. I'm going to a different place. I'm going to prepare you a place. And we'll be there together, forever."

Paul said, "...if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Romans 8:17-18).

IV. When someone you love is on the other side, the other side becomes an awfully important place.

Yes, when you think someone is going away, has gone away, the other side becomes an awfully important place.

Dorothy Brewer tells the story. The house was very quiet. She was all alone when the phone rang, sharply. How vividly she remembered the small voice that said, "Hello, is this heaven?" She thought it was someone clowning, and she said, "It sure is. It's always heaven here."

The child on the other end said, "Is my grandma there, and may I speak to her? She went to heaven, and now I'm so lonesome for her."

The little child began to weep. Dorothy Brewer's heart went out to her. Dorothy realized the child was in great sorrow, grieving over the death of her beloved grandma. Dorothy writes, "I quickly breathed a prayer to my Lord for help. I told her that her grandmother was sleeping and I would not wake her. The precious child said, 'When you see grandma, will you tell her that I love her and miss her very much.' I told her that when I saw her grandma, I would surely give her the message. I told her that her grandma was in a beautiful

place and that she was very happy. I said that if she had Jesus in her heart she would see grandma again.”

“Alright. Good-bye,” the little girl said.

Dorothy said, “Before I could hang up, another voice came on the phone. ‘Whoever you are, please don’t hang up. I want to speak to you.’” So, patiently, Dorothy waited. The lady on the telephone said she was the child’s mother. And then she told her the rest of the story.

Her mother, who had been living with them, passed away. And Linda, her daughter, missed her grandma so very much. They had told her that she had gone to heaven. As time went by, the little girl grieved so much over the death of her grandmother that she became very ill. “She began pleading for us to let her call heaven on the phone. We finally decided to let her make the call. My husband said, ‘Let her call. She’ll dial at random and get no one.’”

“She did get someone, she got me,” Dorothy said. The mother had been listening in on the conversation. Dorothy Brewer told her she lived in California and found out the little girl lived in Florida. Dorothy wrote, “I hope at the proper time Linda will be told she didn’t really reach heaven, but she talked to one of heaven’s children who was still on earth. Needless to say, I wept over the little girl’s grief over the death of her grandmother. How I have been praying for her ever since. And, when I go home to my precious Savior and see Linda’s grandmother, I will surely give her Linda’s message.”

When are your sights lifted? When you’re broken – broken body, broken heart, broken home. When brokenness comes, we set our sights on heaven as our real home.

What we do now invests ourselves for the rest of eternity. The here and now is important only inasmuch as it’s connected to the hereafter. Do we believe in Jesus? Have we accepted the way, the only way? Are we busy about the Father’s business?

Jesus, in John 14, makes a powerful proclamation. “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me.” When Thomas asked Him about the way, He declares, “I am the way.”

John, the same author who writes the Revelation, says that on that glad and glorious day in heaven, God will wipe away every tear from our eyes. There no longer will be any death. There shall be no longer any mourning or crying or pain, for all these have passed away.

V. You are closer to heaven than ever before.

You’ll be home soon, too. You may not have noticed it – even those of us who try to put heaven out of our minds – it’s coming and it’s coming quickly. You are closer to home than ever before. Each moment is a step taken. Each breath is a page turned. Each day is a mile marked, a mountain climbed. We’re closer to home than we’ve ever been before.

Before we know it, our appointed arrival time will come; we'll descend the ramp and enter the City. We'll see the faces that are waiting for us. And we'll realize finally – finally we are really, really home. (Max Lucado, "The Applause of Heaven," *Stories for the Heart*, ed. Alice Gray)

Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me.

In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you.

If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may also be.

My peace I leave with you.