

John 14:1-3

It's nearly as important to take note of what Jesus does not say, as it is of what He does say. "*Let not your hearts be troubled,*" He says. He does not say: Let not your *life* be troubled.

We meet Stephen in our First Reading today. We see the Jews throwing stones at him to kill him. Comparing the Jews to Stephen, which of them had a life that was troubled? Obviously the one being stoned to death. But was Stephen's heart troubled? No. He was at peace.

There are many things which can trouble our lives. Being stoned is surely one of them. But when was the last time someone threw rocks at you? What troubles your life can be very different from what troubles my life. No two burdens are exactly the same.

Nowhere in Scripture does God promise to unburden our life. In fact He promises just the opposite; for an unburdened life is a death sentence. It is a sign of God's wrath, not a sign of His grace. God disciplines those He loves. He throws rocks at them; burdens which He makes them carry. If He didn't, we would go through life undisciplined; not God's children, but the devil's children.

But while Jesus does not want your life to be without trouble, this is not what He wants for your heart. "*Let not your hearts be troubled,*" He says. A troubled heart is not the work of God but the work of the devil.

Satan works in the opposite manner in which God works. Those who want to be Christians; who hold to Christ by hearing His Word; who find comfort in their Baptism and in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, these people Satan opposes. He tries to sadden their hearts and fill them with troubles. He wants such people to be fearful in their hearts; to despair of God's mercy. To such people Jesus says, "*Let not your hearts be troubled.*"

But while Jesus says these words to His Christians, He does not speak these words to the wicked. Rather, God wants the hearts of the wicked to be troubled. For unless their heart is troubled, they will continue in life just as they are.

But here again Satan works in the opposite manner. Those who are wicked he does not oppose. He does not let a single proud and impenitent person despair in his heart. Those wicked people, who care not at all about the preaching of God's Word, or about Baptism and the Lord's Supper, Satan leaves alone. He even builds them up so that they have no fear in their hearts, but are smug and content.

We see his work in our First Reading today. Satan opposed Stephen because he clung to God. Since Stephen would not turn away from Christ, or despair in his heart, Satan got rid of him through these wicked Jews. But these same Jews Satan left alone. They refused to hear God's Word. They even held their hands over their ears when Stephen preached Christ to them. And so Satan did not trouble them, but made them think they were good and noble for stoning Stephen to death.

Not one of us has a life as troubled as was Stephen's life. And quite possibly not one of us has a heart so at peace as was Stephen's heart. For us, the more troubled our life becomes, the more our heart becomes troubled. But for Stephen it was just the opposite. The more troubled his life, the more at peace his heart became.

What was his secret? No secret. But only this: the words of Jesus found a home in his heart. *“Let not your hearts be troubled,”* Jesus says, *“Believe in God; believe also in me. In My Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to Myself, that where I am you may be also.”*

Stephen believed these words. These words lived in his heart. This is why his heart was at peace even as his life became severely troubled. As he was dying, we’re told that Jesus did exactly as He promised. He permitted Stephen, with his eyes, to see his room in heaven, and to see his Lord coming to take him home.

“Well of course!” we say, “No wonder Stephen’s heart was at peace. He saw heaven opened to him and Jesus standing before him!” No. First Stephen believed. First his heart was at peace. And then Jesus permitted him to see. Stephen’s heart was in heaven even while his life was being lived here on earth.

This is no secret, but it might as well be, because it is impossible for anyone to discover this on their own. It is a gift of God. And it comes when His words find a dwelling place in our heart.

His words are in your ears today. Are they in your heart? Can you live just as easily without Jesus’ words as with them? Then they are not in your heart. But if your week, even your day, cannot begin without Jesus’ words, then they have a home in your heart. And then you are one Satan will afflict; for he wants to trouble that heart in which Jesus’ words dwell.

But Jesus says to you, *“Believe in God; believe also in Me.”* Jesus is your God. And He will sustain you. Even if your life falls apart, you still have Jesus. And you still have a room in heaven with Jesus. Let the devil do what he will. And he will do much; as much as God permits him to do. Do not be envious of those people whose lives appear to be blessed. You have Jesus. You have His promise. They do not. Even while Satan attacks your life here, Jesus keeps your heart with Him in heaven. With your heart you see what Stephen saw. You see your room there, and you see Jesus because His words live in your heart.

“Where I am,” are His words to you, *“there you shall be also.”* Where is Jesus? He is not just preparing your room in heaven. He is here within the Divine Service. And that’s why you are here. You are not like those wicked Jews who covered their ears to what Stephen was preaching. Because you believe in God, you believe that Jesus is in the very words given you to hear. And because you believe in God, you believe that Jesus is here in the bread and wine given you to eat.

“Where I am, there you shall be also.” Those who do not want to be with Jesus here will not be with Him in heaven. But this is not you, by the grace of God. Your desire to be with Jesus here is a sure sign that you will be with Him in heaven.

“Let not your hearts be troubled.” It’s not only a troubled life that causes a heart to become troubled. A sinful life does this. And you have one, and so do I. But no matter how sinful your life has been, you still have Jesus. The reason He is preparing your room in heaven is because He made room for your sinful life on His cross. He died for you, friend. And He lives for you. He lives your mansion to prepare. He lives to safely take you there. And until He does, He puts His words and promises into your ears so that they make a home in your heart. Amen.