

Sermon: Do Not Let Your Hearts Be Troubled

As you all know, I am not much of a singer. I would say I have grown more comfortable with you all so that I can actually sing with you in our sanctuary, but not so comfortable that my voice could be audible beyond the first pew. I know I have said this before, but I think it's important context on Choir Sunday. Because it's a very clear reminder that our congregation, our lay leaders, our search and call committee, are so confident in our choir--so enamoured and proud of our choir--that deciding to call a minister who can not sing was never a concern. For one thing, this is a particularly great place for a minister to learn to sing. For all their brilliance, our choir is equally gracious and inviting--they really want us *all* to sing. There is a clear

invitation to join them. And so many of us have. Our choir knows that they can count on Margery and Amy to find any newcomers their own place, their own voice. So we really have a church choir as a church choir should be: dedicated, joyful, faithful. It is, like the church, a community within a community, showing the world a better Way; just as our church continually endeavours to be, our choir is open and affirming of all.

I remember when I had previously mentioned my less-than-stellar singing from the pulpit, Nancy Marshall tracked me down after the service to tell me about her father. Her father was like me--a raw talent, let's say. But this was never a deterrent for him, it never stopped him from singing. And now Nancy holds onto that memory; she can still hear him singing,

and that's what matters. Even if Nancy's father didn't realize it, his refusal to be deterred, his determination to sing and sing and to be *heard*, means his daughter will always hear his voice.

This is something many of us have to work on. Knowing in our heads that it is more important to be heard than to speak or sing perfectly, doesn't always quiet our nerves. Being our true selves, expressing ourselves honestly, daring to allow ourselves to be heard and seen just as God made us, is a work in progress for so many of us. But that is precisely why we have a choir, and why we have a sanctuary. It is the place, uniquely in the world, where the importance of simply being imperfectly heard is recognized and shepherded into the perfect sound of unity and love. The choir and Nancy's father remind us how unity under God actually works. It does not make us all pitch perfect, in the

case of Nancy's father or myself; it does not make us all sound or look or love the same. Instead, God's unity is a welcoming, inclusive call, recognizing and affirming the inherent worth of everyone, and upon that--that cornerstone or bedrock--one choir, one community can be built up, becoming out of many, one. It does no good to deny or erase someone, or to exclude even one voice. God is the source of all creatures and sounds; if we are to worship truly, if we are to glorify God truly, we will need to include everyone in our sacred task.

That is the mission and the soul of our church. So it is no wonder that this time of social isolation and distancing would be *especially* difficult for us. When your church especially sings together--really sings--how do we do church when we aren't

able to sing together? Thanks to Amy and Margery, we haven't been going without music. They (and Octavia too!) have been pouring the same effort and talent into our service, and lifting our spirits with their gifts. But unfortunately we have had to go without choir. So not only is our physical sanctuary closed, but our church's greatest, most mesmerizing strength--our inner sanctuary, that perfect sound of unity and love--has also had to take a break. It is hard to feel like singing when we can not be together to support one another, to hear one another, to make that glorious sound together. And it is hard to feel like ourselves. For all of us who are in that category of "a work in progress," still learning to be more truly and openly who we are, still struggling to really feel God's special inscription on our own heart, suddenly we are having to go without the most shining

example of what we are trying to become. We are looking for our sanctuary; we are looking for our choir, because we need it to find our way, to find our own voice, to feel and know God's gracious presence in our midst.

But there is good news. Notwithstanding a little last minute frost and snow, spring has come. The flowers are bright, the green canopies are creeping up the hills. And, like the voices of our fathers and mothers, no matter how much we miss them we do not forget the voices of our choir. In the Gospel according to John, Jesus urges the faithful, "do not let your hearts be troubled." Maybe we need to hear Jesus' voice this morning. In this time of grief and frustration, Jesus is still speaking to us. And he says, even as we search frantically, that already a room

has been made up for us in God's house. Already a mother who loves us--no matter how tired she might be, no matter how we might have frightened her or made her life more difficult--has prepared our place. Already a mother who delights in our happiness, who is proud of us no matter what--because she truly knows us, because she made and created us--is welcoming us home. Because our mother feels what we feel, experiences our every hardship as her own, misses us dearly as we wander--out of love, our mother must keep a room for us. She is not whole until we are home. Here we are searching, frantically and needlessly, even as our mother--our God--who is always with us in our hearts and spirit, has already found us, is already keeping us, is now only waiting for us to take the place she has already prepared.

So let us, for now, be content to hear Jesus' voice; enjoin it with what we so vividly remember and cherish about our choir's many, many voices. Do not let your heart be troubled, because our place in our mother's love, our place in God's house, is fixed and secure. And in due time, we will hear God's own singing voice through our choir again.

Alleluia and amen!