

Do Not Let Your Heart Be Troubled

John 14:1-14

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May 10, 2020

Into the Unknown is a beautiful song written by Kristen Anderson Lopez and Robert Lopez for Disney's animated film *Frozen 2*, which was released during this past Christmas season. The song, originally recorded by Idina Menzel and AURORA was nominated for an Oscar for Best Original Song. Those two women, along with nine of the song's international singers, singing in nine different languages, performed *Into the Unknown* at this year's Academy Awards Ceremony in February. It was not only a spectacular performance, it is indicative of how the film resonates with people far and wide. The film itself is illustrative of the universal nature of how we humans respond to change, and how we respond to facing an unknown future. *Frozen*'s main characters Elsa and her sister Ana, like the disciples in today's story, are being asked to overcome their fear and sadness... trusting enough to follow a path despite the fact that it is entirely unclear where that path will lead! Naturally, there is a tension that rises within us at the thought of not knowing. The unknown elicits fear. The unknown elicits anxiety.

In today's Scripture, we pick up in the middle of Jesus delivering what is often called his "Farewell Discourse." In the verses immediately preceding what Becca read today, Jesus tells Peter, "Where I am going you cannot follow; but you will follow afterward." Peter protests and offers his claim that he will give up his life for Jesus. Jesus then predicts his inevitable denial. In today's reading we join the Farewell Discourse with Jesus offering the disciples his reassurance, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in me."

He attempts to describe how he will prepare a place for them and offers some instruction about what this will be like. The first disciple to protest is Thomas. He resisted Jesus' message about leaving because he did not know what would happen. All this talk about rooms and enigmatic traveling was just so confusing to the disciples which only served to raise their anxiety. Thomas said, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" From this question, we get the deep sense that Thomas knows he is missing something.

The question feels similar to the questions Elsa sings in her song, from *Frozen 2*

“Can you show me?

Where are you going?

Don’t leave me alone...

How do I follow you

Into the unknown?’”¹

Jesus’ reply is a profound one, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.” He wants the disciples to realize that *he is the way*. Even though his statement is not immediately clear, Jesus is encouraging his disciples that his death is not the end, but the beginning of the “way.” The way into the unknown. Jesus’ invitation is to trust that because they know him, they also know God. Jesus actually says, “from now on you *do* know him and have seen him.” Jesus seems to be telling the disciples in their time of deep uncertainty, “Hang your hearts on God: hang your hearts on me.” Jesus finishes his sentence, “no one comes to the father, except through me.”

Biblical preaching scholar Karoline Lewis has a great perspective about this particular “I am” statement of Jesus. She points out that when Jesus says “if you know me” it is a condition of fact, “if you know me, and you do!” which makes these words of comfort to the disciples, not words of condition.² I love that... because Jesus wants them to be secure in knowing that there is nothing uncertain for their present or for their future because of their relationship with him.

Returning to the Farewell Discourse... the second disciple to protest is Philip, who requests to see the father. To this, Jesus responds with the most unambiguous claims about his identity. In this regard, the Farewell Discourse is no different than the other dialogues and discourses in the Gospel. There is always movement from misunderstanding to recognition of who Jesus is revealing himself to be, yet here, the stakes are higher. The Farewell Discourse includes not only parting words for comfort, but clarification of what is to come, lest the disciples (or we) misinterpret the events of the Passion Narrative.

Though the disciples could not really understand at this point, Jesus laid the foundation for what they would need in the dark times ahead of them, sort of like

¹ (Lee, 2019)

² (Lewis, 2014)

building up some resilience in advance. These disciples are still oblivious, still overconfident. They don't yet know the pain of losing Jesus. They are facing a future of loss which they don't yet understand. So, Jesus is really laying it on the line. He implores the disciples five times in these verses to **trust**.

In *Frozen 2*, the younger sister Ana finds herself in a dark time: feeling alone, and filled with fear and grief. Her song *The next right thing* unfolds in this way,

“The life I knew is over, the lights are out

Hello darkness, I'm ready to succumb

I follow you around, I always have

But you've gone to a place I cannot find

This grief has gravity, it pulls me down.

But a tiny voice whispers in my mind

You are lost, hope is gone, but you must go on...

Take a step, step again.

It is all that I can do, the next right thing.

I won't look too far ahead, it's too much to take

But break it down to the next breath, the next step

The next choice is the one I can make

So, I'll walk through this night stumbling blindly toward the light.

When it's clear that everything will never be the same again

Then I'll make the choice to hear that voice and do the next right thing.”³

I think, as for the characters in this profound Disney film (as well as for the disciples) the next right thing for us is to put our trust in the God of the universe,

³ (Lee, 2019)

revealed to us in the person of Jesus the Christ. Trusting God empowers us to have increased confidence stepping into the unknown. The future really is unknown to us. We have recently learned, as a result of this pandemic, that even what we *think* we know can be turned upside down pretty quickly and pretty dramatically. We are living in an unsettled time and we have experienced our own losses. Jesus wants us to know that when we face darkness, whatever form that darkness takes, trusting God helps us to be more accepting of the unknown. Hear this as good news! God is trustworthy, even when life is not.

Bibliography

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