

Funeral - John 14:1-7 – Leah Simmonds

“Do not let your hearts be troubled.”

The first words that Jesus spoke to his disciples are hard for us to hear on occasion like this.

Our hearts are troubled.

A woman we knew and loved has left this life.

Yes she had a long and a very full life.

She loved music,

played the guitar.

She loved church.

Some people go to church because they think they ought to.

Leah loved it.

She loved the people around her.

As a child, she was one of six siblings.

In later years,

She enjoyed the company of her sister, Jan.

But even though we rejoice in the blessings God gave Leah, we still feel the pain of the broken relationship.

Of course our hearts are deeply troubled.

And Jesus’ disciples’ hearts were troubled too.

Jesus had told them that he was leaving them

and going back to the Father.

So they felt the pain of separating relationships,

Just like we feel the pain of losing Leah.

But Jesus says “Do not let your hearts be troubled”.

It’s not because Jesus doesn’t feel the pain of separation.

Jesus wept at Lazarus’ tomb

even though he knew that he would raise him.

Jesus felt the pain of the brokenness of our world.

But Jesus says “Do not let your hearts be troubled.”

because he can see past this temporary separation

to the glory of heaven.

“My Father’s house has many rooms.
If that were not so,
Would I have told you
that I’m going there to prepare a place for you?”
In Jesus’ mind,
The stress was on the many.
“In my Father’s house are many rooms.”
Jesus’ disciples were worried about him going away.
Jesus’ point is
“We will be reunited and there is room for all of you.
No one need miss out.”
There are no space limitations in heaven.
God has room enough for all who will accept his invitation.
That’s a point worth pausing at.
I don’t want to let this service go by
without that invitation being personally extended to you.
Leah would want you to join her in heaven.
So allow me to extend the invitation to you.
If you don’t know the Lord Jesus
or you’ve wandered away from him,
then grasp hold of eternal life.
Jesus gives eternal life
to those who put their trust in him and follow him.
Sometimes people say to me,
“I’d be a hypocrite if I started following Jesus now.
All these years I’ve be doing things my own way.
I’ve basically ignored God.
I’ve lived for myself.
Wouldn’t it be hypocritical
to turn around and ask him for eternal life now?”

I was talking to a primary school teacher about that.
She said to me,
“Isn’t it a bit hypocritical to live your life however you want,

And then come back to church when you've had your fun?"

I said to her,

"Suppose one of the kids in your class
was being really naughty.

They were feral from 9am to 3pm.

And then at 3pm they decided to behave.

The bell to go home rings at 3.30pm.

Would you call the kid a hypocrite?

Or would you rejoice about that last half an hour?

That teacher was in the middle
of a really tough day at school.

The answer to that question was a no brainer for her."

God rejoices whenever any of us turn to Jesus.

God is passionate about rescuing people
and taking them into his kingdom.

Other people might look at you a bit strange.

They might say,

"Ah, he's gone all religious on us."

or "She changed."

I guess you have to make up your mind

about whether you are more interested in what God thinks
or what other people think.

Whether you are more interested in eternity or the present.

OK so Jesus has comforted his disciples

by telling them that there is plenty of room for all of them
in his Father's house.

The next thing he says is,

"I'm going there to prepare a place for you."

Again this would be easy to misunderstand.

You could think he was talking about making the beds and
fluffing the cushions –

Getting everything ready.

But that's not what Jesus is saying at all.

He means 'my going to the Father is in itself
the very thing that prepares a place for you'.
It's not what Jesus is going to do when he gets there that
prepares the place –
It's the going itself.
How does Jesus go to heaven?
He goes by the way of the cross.
Within 24 hours of speaking these words,
Jesus would be crucified.
It's the death of Jesus,
It's the way he returns to the Father
that prepares a place for his friends.
Jesus' death is the sacrifice that pays the price of sin.
Jesus' disciples were not good enough
to stand in the presence of God.
On our own,
you and I are not worthy
to step over the threshold into heaven.
We can be worthy only because the blood of Jesus has been
applied to our lives.
“For God so loved the world
That he gave his only Son
That whoever believes in him shall not perish
But have eternal life.”
God gave his only Son.
Praise God that his did so.

Jesus continues to his disciples,
“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.”
Jesus of course did leave his disciples
and he went back to the Father.
He promised to return one day.

On that day, the dead will be raised.
The righteous will be raised to eternal life.
But it's been 2000 years.
What the guarantee that Jesus has not forgotten about us?
The guarantee is in the going.
He endured the cross so that our sins might be forgiven.
Would he really have gone through all that suffering
on our behalf and then forget about us?
Jesus will not abandon us.
He will not leave us to the ravages of death.
He has given proof of it by the way he left.

Jesus finishes giving comfort to his distressed disciples with a slightly cryptic comment.

“You know the way to the place where I am going.”

Now the excitable Thomas bursts out,

“Lord, we don't even know where you are going,
So how can we know the way?”

It makes sense, doesn't it?

If you don't know where you are going,

You can't know the way to get there.

So was Jesus mistaken when he said,

“You know the way to the place where I am going”?

Here's a hot tip for Bible reading.

An explanation that depends on Jesus being mistaken
is a sign to keep looking for a better explanation.

Jesus' answer was,

“I am the way, the truth and the life.

No one comes to the Father except through me.”

They do know the way.

They don't yet realise that they know the way.

But Jesus is the way to heaven and they know Jesus.

Which is a great way to say,

You don't need to know all the answers
but you do need to know Jesus.

Faith.

What's the definition?

Forsaking All I Trust Him.

Forsaking All I Trust Him.

Knowing Jesus, trusting Jesus.

That's what our lives need to be about.

The death of Leah confronts us with our own mortality.

“Suppose you die tonight.

And you get to the pearly gates,

And St Peter says to you,

“Why should I let you in?”

What would you say to him?”

You see the point is it's not about living a good life.

If your answer to that question

is about having lived a pretty good life,

then you haven't understood the Christian faith.

You might have been baptised and confirmed.

You might have been married in the church.

You might never have cheated on your tax return.

But if you rely on yourself and the good you've done,

you won't pass muster when Jesus comes back.

When St Peter says “Why should I let you in?”

The answer has to be along these lines.

I know the owner of the house,

He is the Father of Jesus Christ.

I know Jesus.

Jesus said anyone who knows me knows my Father as well.

And Jesus promised that he would prepare a place for me.

I trust in Jesus and his promise.

Leah trusted in Jesus and his promise.

That's why we can be confident that she is with the Lord.
Yes she was a loving woman.
But being a loving woman doesn't get you into heaven.
Trusting in Jesus does.
Leah did.
She would love it if you did too.
That's my prayer for all of us today.
That we would trust in Jesus and his promise.