

May 1, 2016
Rev. Diane Monti-Catania

Sermon - "Do Not Let Your Hearts Be Troubled"

Do not let your hearts be troubled.

Don't worry.

Everything is going to be all right.

I'm here.

I promise.

These are words of comfort that we might share with others or that we might long to hear ourselves.

Jesus' disciples in today's reading are worried and anxious. They don't understand what he is talking about and he is making them nervous.

He reassures them and in the next verses promises to send the Holy Spirit.

Often, when we are scared or nervous, we can be calmed with just a few reassuring words.

Writer Thich Nhat Hanh tells us that we can provide such reassurance ourselves.

His writings have been among those I have explored in the past few weeks as I've been studying individual and communal peacemaking.

I have been exploring ways that people can transform their anger or hatred into love and peace.

Nhat Hanh urges his readers to practice mindfulness as a path to peaceful living.

He recommends five steps for transforming feelings of anger, depression, anxiety, or fear into peacefulness.

1. recognize each feeling as it arises-name it – call it fear if that is what it is;
2. become one with the feeling-don't fight it-welcome it, acknowledge it;
3. Calm the feeling-this is most often done with breathing deeply, perhaps walking;
4. Release the feeling, to let it go-don't let it own you, Know that you are stronger than your particular feeling;
5. Look deeply into the feeling – what made you feel that way? Feelings of anger and fear are often based on inaccurate perceptions, stories, or histories.

Nhat Hanh argues that anger and hatred are the materials from which hell is made while the absence of anger is the basis of real happiness, the basis of love and compassion.

As humans we can transform anger into peace, love and understanding.

Understanding and love are not two things, but just one.

When you understand you cannot help but love.

You cannot get angry.

To develop understanding, you have to practice looking at all living beings with the eyes of compassion.

When you understand, you cannot help but love.

And when you love, you naturally act in a way that can relieve the suffering of people.

This is the same message Jesus delivers when he says, "I am the way and the truth and the life."

Jesus is reassuring us that if we follow his teachings, if we live with love in our hearts we will find the eternal peace that is promised.

Peacemaking happens when we can agree as a community to a certain way of being.

In the UCC we call this covenant.

In the religious order Nhat Hanh serves they called it the Fourteen Precepts of the Order of Interbeing.

They are rules that echo both our ten commandments and the teachings found in the New Testament.

I share them with you to motivate you to think about the rules which order your own life:

1. Do not be idolatrous about or bound to any doctrine, theory or ideology. All systems of thought are guiding means; they are not absolute truth;
2. Do not think that the knowledge you presently possess is changeless, absolute truth. Avoid being narrow-minded and bound to present views. Learn and practice non-attachment from views in order to be open to receive other's viewpoints. Truth is found in life and not merely in conceptual knowledge. Be ready to learn throughout your entire life and to observe reality in yourself and in the world at all times.
3. Do not force others, including children, by any means whatsoever, to adopt your views, whether by authority, threat, money, propaganda, or even education. However, through compassionate dialogue, help others renounce fanaticism and narrowness.
4. Do not avoid contact with suffering or close your eyes before suffering. Do not lose awareness of the existence of suffering in the life of the world. Find ways to be with those who are suffering, by all means, including personal contact and visits, images, and sound. By such means, awaken yourself and others to the reality of suffering in the world.

5. Do not accumulate wealth while millions are hungry. Do not take as the aim of your life fame, profit, wealth, or sensual pleasure. Live simply and share time, energy, and material resources with those who are in need.
6. Do not maintain anger or hatred. Learn to penetrate and transform them while they are still seeds in your consciousness. As soon as anger or hatred arises, turn your attention to your breathing in order to see and understand the nature of your anger or hatred and the nature of the persons who have caused your anger or hatred.
7. Do not lose yourself in dispersion and in your surroundings. Practice mindful breathing in order to come back to what is happening in the present moment. Be in touch with what is wondrous, refreshing, and healing, both inside and around yourself. Plant the seeds of joy, peace and understanding in yourself in order to facilitate the work of transformation in the depths of your consciousness.
8. Do not utter words that can create discord and cause the community to break. Make every effort to reconcile and resolve all conflicts, however small.
9. Do not say untruthful things for the sake of personal interest or to impress people. Do not utter words that cause division and hatred. Do not spread news that you do not know to be certain. Do not criticize or condemn things that you are not sure of. Always speak truthfully and constructively. Have the courage to speak out about situations of injustice, even when doing so may threaten your own safety.
10. Do not use the religious community for personal gain or profit, or transform your community into a political party. A religious community should, however, take a clear stand against oppression and injustice, and should strive to change the situation without engaging in partisan conflicts.
11. Do not live with a vocation that is harmful to humans and nature. Do not invest in companies that deprive others of their chance to live. Select a vocation that helps realize your ideal of compassion.
12. Do not kill. Do not let others kill. Find whatever means possible to protect life and prevent war.
13. Possess nothing that should belong to others. Respect the property of others but prevent others from enriching themselves from human suffering or the suffering of other beings.
14. Do not mistreat your body. Learn to handle it with respect. Do not look on your body as only an instrument. Preserve vital energies for the realization of the Way.

I hope you find these precepts helpful.

I encourage you to develop your own rules – parameters that will guide your life, your choices, bring you closer to God.

I believe that when we are clear about what we believe and how we conduct ourselves, we truly are happier.

I also believe that God is happier when we live according to the precepts God has provided.

Over the past few months I have had the privilege of meeting individually with each of our seven confirmands.

One of the questions I ask them is how they feel about coming to church.

One response that warmed my heart was “I like coming to church. It makes me feel happy. I am a better person when I come to church – it helps me to think about being nice to people.”

I hope that you like coming to church and that you find you are a better person by practicing your faith in community.

We are all on this journey together, learning, growing, exploring, trying to make sense out of life.

So take a deep breath, calm yourself, and do not let your hearts be troubled.