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Isaiah 61: 1 – 3
Revelation 7: 9 - 17Psalm 90: 1 – 12
John 14: 1 – 6

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places.”

Don’t let your hearts be troubled. Easier to say than to do when we have lost someone that we dearly love. How can our hearts not be troubled when we can’t yet envision a future without that person actively in our lives? How can our hearts not be troubled when we allow our minds to play the “if only” game, or think of all the changes that are coming, or feel the hole in our hearts? Trust me, Jesus says. Trust God, trust me, too. And thereby let your hearts be at peace.

In our English translation, the word ‘believe’ is translated from the Greek word πιστεωω, meaning to trust, to believe, to ‘faith,’ to give credit to, to entrust. If we were to look at the Latin, the word would be ‘credo,’ from which we get the word ‘creed.’ But the sense of both πιστεωω and credo is really “to give one’s heart.” Belief in God is not really about intellectual assent. To say “I believe” is really to say, “I give my heart to ____.” Or “I entrust myself to ____.” Believe in God, Jesus says, believe also in me. Give your heart to me, Jesus says. Let me take it into my healing hands; let me fill the empty spaces with my love; let me be in charge of your heart. Then, you will not be troubled.

Ebenezer Ugorji, as I knew him, was a soft-spoken, gentle man. And a gentleman. There was almost always a little laugh or a big smile about ready to break out on his face, with crinkles around his eyes, even when he was in pain from his back or other medical issues. Minette told me that one of the first things that attracted her to Ebenezer was his kindness. How he treated others, and especially her grandmother. Ebenezer cared deeply for people and expressed that in nurturing and tending, no matter what that involved. His approach to life was measured, quiet and thoughtful, and perhaps that was wisdom acquired painfully from the war experiences in the earlier part of his life that were violent and horrific. I think it *must* have been his trust in God, his hope, which got him through the armed conflicts in his home country.

Perhaps those early experiences and that hope for a better way also drove his choice to study and then to teach government. Ebenezer left his homeland to come to this country and study political science, and specifically American government, while he made his home in Washington, D. C. With Minette, and then with Chika and Ukachi, he made his home *here*. Here as in Statesboro, but here also as in Trinity. Ebenezer was an active and regular part of his church home and family. Ebenezer formally made the United States – and Statesboro – his home when he became an American citizen in 1990, 27 years ago this past Wednesday.

“In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places,” Jesus says. “If it weren’t so, would I tell you that I’m going to prepare a place for you?” “Lord, you have been our refuge, from one generation to another,” the Psalmist writes. St. Augustine of Hippo famously said that ‘our hearts are restless until they rest in [God].’ Ebenezer came a long way from home, from where he was born – geographically, intellectually, spiritually and emotionally. It’s the same journey that each of us makes, to one degree or another and in our own way, as we go through this life. For people of faith, ‘home’ is a relative term. Some of us cling to one particular earthly place as home, while others of us feel like turtles: our homes are wherever we are. But if home is where the heart is, and if we have given our

hearts to God – if we have entrusted ourselves to God, to Jesus – then our only true home is with God, or perhaps *in* God.

Ebenezer is truly home now. Where, one day, we shall all be. In the Book of Revelation, we hear, “After that I looked and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne...” That is the Communion of Saints, of which Ebenezer is now a part. Ebenezer was many things to many people – husband, father, brother, uncle, co-worker, professor, friend, faithful Christian, and now, one of the saints who has gone before us. And today, we gather to celebrate his life as we have known it, and even more importantly, we gather to celebrate his new, risen life in Jesus Christ.

“For this reason, they are before the throne of God and worship [God] day and night...” John continues in the Book of Revelation, “...they will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” What a lovely, peace-filled home Ebenezer now enjoys. When he would be surprised at something someone would say, Ebenezer’s eye brows would go way up, his eyes get big and his mouth form an “O.” Often followed by that unique laugh of his. We can only imagine how big his eyes are, how joyous his laugh is, as he already takes in what is beyond our imagining. Our hearts are restless until they rest in you, O God. Ebenezer’s heart now rests in God. Welcome home, Ebenezer! +