Seems a bit of a stretch, Jesus.

We’re in the midst of a global pandemic, the economy is cratering, unemployment numbers are staggering, and any sense of national unity was long ago trashed on the rocks of partisan news media and political spin. We have trouble agreeing on actual facts in real time in the real world. And now there are “murder Hornets”? Come on…. Throw in reasonable concerns about aging and cancer and family issues and having a troubled heart seems acceptable, almost normal. Too suggest otherwise is a stretch.

But, there’s Jesus,

Don’t let your hearts be troubled…

I’m a pastor, in large part, because in the early 80s I served an internship at Roseland Christian Ministries and met Tony Van Zanten. He was a colorful charismatic preacher; with his leadership scripture seemed alive and the life of a small poor black congregation was life-giving. Week in and week out, everything felt close to the bone – the living and the dying, the energy, brokenness, joy and loss made being gathered together in worship essential. And at the end of every service, Rev. Tony with great drama and a sort of folksy warmth would offer his remix of the words of Jesus. He’d say,

In this world you will have trouble, but take heart, be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world. Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you – not as the world gives, give I unto you. Don’t let your hearts be troubled, neither be afraid, go in peace.

And I desperately wanted, needed, longed for that sense of peace. It seemed crucial to keep going; you needed it to love and serve for another week. It seemed raw and real and worthy of investing a life….

Still seems true today.
I still long for a word of peace from God.
But, it also seems farther away, more elusive, even a stretch.
How is it that our hearts would not be troubled?

A little context for our text…
This is part of the last long conversation Jesus has with his disciples. It’s Thursday night, he’s about to be betrayed and handed over to Pilate. By midday on Friday he’ll be whipped, nailed, and hung up to die.
Therefore, one theologian invites us to notice the “acoustics” of this passage. Things have taken a dark turn: Judas has already left, Jesus has predicted Peter’s denial, and as a last symbolic act he’s washed his disciple’s feet. He’ll soon be praying alone with the deepest groanings of his heart. So, given all that, it is hard to imagine that Jesus would gather himself, push out his chest, and offer a spiritual pep talk. As Scott Hoezee puts it:

*It is far more likely that Jesus spoke with a quivering chin and with tears forming in the corner of his eyes. After all, Jesus is telling them not to let their hearts be troubled but the main reason he needed to say that is because in reality, trouble was all around.*

So, dear friends, may there be some consolation in recognizing that Jesus knows a troubled heart and a broken world. He’s not offering a tone-deaf spiritual bromide, but he’s speaking into a reality in which he’s well versed.

Jesus knows a troubled heart.

Jesus knows your troubled heart….

*Don’t let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in me.*

That line reads not unlike a commandment or a list of things to do. Start with your heart, take a deep breath, calm it down, and then place your trust in God. Those are the instructions of Jesus.

That’s the way the line reads in English….

What’s lost in translation is a gentle affirmation. The word here for trust is actually voiced as a statement of reality not as an instruction. This is less a list of things to do and a more window into the way things are. It might be better translated as:

*Don’t let your hearts be troubled. As you (already) trust in God, trust also in me.*

Jesus recognizes that his disciples trust in God. Jesus knows that they have some semblance of or some longing for faith. The real twist here is that he invites that same trust in himself….

I was at best a middling student. I scraped by through high school, college, and seminary in the C+ range. That seemed good enough, because try as I might I couldn’t focus, sit still, or concentrate. There was always something else demanding my attention. There was always some angst or unsettledness. There were day dreams and big dreams and drifty dreams and “Wait, what did you say?” I wasn’t happy with this state of affairs. I wondered, worried and agonized about why it was all so much easier for everybody else.

Why was I always unable to sustain attention?

Why was I always late or lost or bored or restless?

When I was in my late twenties I stumbled upon an essay by a young man living with Attention Deficit Disorder. I was blown away. ADD was a relatively new diagnosis but it was as if the author had been in my skin. Every sentence was in keeping with my experience. And, for the
first time there was a way to make sense. It wasn’t some moral failing or laziness or selfishness or a curse. I wasn’t alone.

That realization was, for me, a seismic shift. The ground under my feet moved. Everything changed. I had a new way of making sense of myself and my reality.

Jesus names a seismic shift.

Jesus names a new reality that requires the disciples to change their fundamental sense of things. Jesus goes from, “Don’t let your heart be troubled,” to moving the ground under their feet.

*Don’t let your hearts be troubled, as you (already) trust in God, trust in me.*

There’s no metaphor here. Think of last week, “I am the sheep gate.” Rather, here, straight up with no chaser, Jesus invokes for himself the same trust they would have in God.

The disciples are rightly mystified. “Wait, what?” And the conversation turns to Jesus saying that he is the only way to the Father and that to know him is to know the Father….

Philip felt the earth tremble and asks for clarification.

*Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.*

Jesus is taken aback.

After all this time together…

At this crucial juncture…

he thought,

they believed,

he was a unique window to God.

In his words:

*Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in me?*

Now. In scripture there are all sorts of ways in which individuals stand in relationship to God. This is the only place where that relationship is framed as: I am in God and God is in me. This is the only place where that kind of intimacy, intertwined-ness and identity is proclaimed. And therefore, Jesus asks his disciples to believe differently, to trust differently.

And that is really quite remarkable….

While things are taking a dark turn, with trouble all around, even as he encourages his disciples to be not afraid, Jesus makes a remarkable claim. Jesus offers an essential-confessional-Christological-distinction at a moment of crisis.

And, of course, the disciples struggled with that distinction.
So, Jesus says to Philip:

*Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe the evidence of the works themselves.*

In other words: If you can’t get your mind around that, at least believe what you have seen. Believe the evidence. And, this exchange comes right after Jesus healed a man who was blind from birth, raised Lazarus from the dead, and washed the disciples’ feet. Jesus tells Philip to see those as signposts pointing toward the unique-singular-particular-mysterious-scandalous way in which Jesus is in God and God is in Jesus.

*Don’t let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in me.*

Dear friends, even in this time of trouble we’re invited to trust in Jesus – not as a teacher, or a friend, or a mystic, or a hero, but as one with God.

Listen again to Scott Hoezee:

*At a perilous time of pandemic when everyone is seeking to be less troubled, to know that God can be with us in this scary and disorienting time, Jesus’ call to not be troubled helps us, but only because the same One who issued the call soon found himself in—quite literally—a hell of a lot of trouble. But if he’s been to hell and back for us and for our salvation, then we know in this COVID-19 moment, he is here. With us. So, let not your hearts be troubled.*

Is that helpful?  
Is that comforting?  
Does that speak to your heart?

The promise of God in Christ is not that we will be spared trouble, not that there won’t be dark days, but that we’re not alone. The remarkable claim of the gospels is that Jesus is one with us and one with God. Rather than a spiritual pep-talk, or a list of things to do, we’re given God born among us, suffering and dying with us, only to be resurrected with the promise that we’ll be joined with him. Therefore, don’t let your hearts be troubled, neither be afraid.

That was a seismic shift for the disciples.  
May we hear it with the same wonder and find in it a sustaining comfort.  
For, as the Heidelberg Catechism puts it:

*What’s your only comfort in life and in death?*  
*That I am not my own, but belong, body and soul, in life and death, to my faithful savior Jesus Christ.*

Thanks be to God.  
Amen.