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by Pat Marrin

[View Author Profile](#)

patrickjmarrin@gmail.com.

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“Do not let your hearts be troubled” (John 14:1).

Fifth Sunday of Easter

Acts 6:1-7; Ps 33; 1 Pet 2:4-9; John 14:1-12

The word “trouble” has a long etymological history going back the Latin *turbulare*, to trouble, disturb; make turbid, cloudy, stir up, mix. We use the expression “to muddy the waters” when someone is stirring up trouble, causing confusion. When conflicts in Ireland in the late 20th century went unresolved and entered the political and social fabric of the country, they were called simply “The Troubles.”

American songwriter Paul Simon wrote the 1970 hit “Bridge Over Troubled Waters,” based on phrase he found in a Gospel song. Its appeal was both intimate and collective at a time when American society was experiencing real turbulence and uncertainty. The chorus repeats the comforting promise, “Like a bridge over troubled waters I will lay me down.”

We see this role fulfilled in Jesus as he comforts his disciples. He is the one who lays down his life across the most troubling waters of all, the passage from this life through death to new life. Even this trouble cannot disrupt their relationship. He is going the Father, but as long as they remain in him, the life they share will never be interrupted.

Jesus not only acts as a bridge to God, he *is* the bridge between humanity and divinity. By his Incarnation, he has opened our humanity to divine life with God. By

our baptism we are already passing from death to life, part of the new Creation Jesus initiated through his cross and resurrection. The discourses in the fourth Gospel are like a personal conversation or love letter between Jesus and the church, dispelling fear and the anxiety that can overtake the heart in the midst of trouble. He provides a peace that the world cannot give.

As a faith community, we are being tested and will be further tested by the unfolding impact of the pandemic on our society economically and culturally. All our institutions and national ideals are under stress. We witness signs of heroic service and generous neighbor to neighbor support. We also see disturbing signs along the fault lines within our nation where healing and reconciliation are needed. It will be up to all of us to determine which of these two currents guides our national discourse.

Troubled hearts need clarity and reassurance, and only God can provide the bedrock of love that rebuilds trust and courage. Easter faith is a way of life when we know that we can lay down our lives for one another. Jesus has gone before us to show that love is stronger than trouble. When the time comes that we need it most, this strength will be provided, and he will be with us. Now may be that time.

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