

# THE HEART OF THE MATTER - "KEPT IN OUR HEARTS"

## Eastertide

John 14:15-21

A Sermon Preached by Pastor Peter Ilgenfritz  
University Congregational United Church of Christ  
Seattle, Washington 98125  
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Scripture:

**John 14:15-21<sup>1</sup>**

Jesus said, "If you love me, show it by doing what I've told you. I will talk to God who will provide you another Friend so that you will always have someone with you. This Friend is the Spirit of Truth. The godless world can't take in the Spirit because it doesn't have eyes to see the Spirit, doesn't know what to look for. But you know the Spirit already because the Spirit has been staying with you, and will even be in you!

"I will not leave you orphaned. I'm coming back. In just a little while the world will no longer see me, but you're going to see me because I am alive and you're about to come alive. At that moment you will know absolutely that I'm in God, and you're in me, and I'm in you. The person who knows my commandments and keeps them, that's who loves me. And people who love me will be loved by God, and I will love them and make myself plain to them."

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Pastor Peter Ilgenfritz

An early morning late May

May 22, 1967

Hỏa Lò Prison,

North Vietnam

A place that's been John Borling's home for the last 345 days and would be his home for the next 1800 days, until he and other prisoners of war would be released.\*

You're alone in your cell.

You listen. *[Enacted]*

*[Knock(s) - Pause (—) - Knock(s)]: — 2, 3 — 1, 5 — 3, 1 — 3, 1 — 3, 4 —.*

Hello.

Hello.

How it was all of these men in solitary confinement found a way to communicate with each other using the simple thing called the Tap Code, a way that they could share letters with each other and pass on language and pass on word and, most importantly, pass on connection. As John Borling said, "The Tap Code saved our lives." It is a very simple code. The first tap is the number of rows down. The second tap is the number of columns across.

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<sup>1</sup> Paraphrase, from *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*, translation by Eugene Peterson, 1993-2002.

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"A" would be this – \* 1, 1 \*; "B" – \* 1, 2 \*.  
Hello. <sup>2</sup>

TAP CODE	1	2	3	4	5
1	A	B	C/K	D	E
2	F	G	H	I	J
3	L	M	N	O	P
4	Q	R	S	T	U
5	V	W	X	Y	Z

The word of today is "Hello".

The inspiration from those many years ago – some 50 years ago today -- is that people have found and will find new ways to say "hello". And where are those people today? Needing new ways to figure out how to say hello to what is going on deep within us that we do not understand and don't know how to put words to. How to say hello to all of this going on in the world that we do not understand and do not know how to give voice to – how to say hello to each other.

It was a long time ago -- a long time ago -- perhaps 90 Years after Jesus had died. And the community that had gathered together -- and that the author of the Gospel of John wrote to and for -- about this Jesus who had died wanted them to remember that this Jesus is still speaking and still wants them to hear Jesus' "hello" to them.

But how do we hear?  
How do we hear the hello from somebody who is gone?  
How *do* we hear the hello from somebody has died?  
How *do* we say hello and I love you to somebody who is leaving us?

We need a new language. We need some new ways -- today -- to say hello to what is in here to "hello" to what is out there. And this time together is as simple as that: to take the time to just listen to the grief that perhaps you and I need to hear within us -- and perhaps to offer a word of hope and hearing to what is going on around us. I don't know what to do with my grief and perhaps you don't either.

## (Musical Prayer)<sup>3</sup>

Had an apartment in the city  
Me and Loretta like livin' there.  
It's been years since the kids have grown,  
A life of their own, left us alone.

John and Linda live in Omaha.  
Joe is somewhere on the road.  
We lost Davey in the Korean War,  
I still don't know what for, doesn't matter anymore.

Ya' know old trees just grow stronger;  
Old rivers grow wilder ev'ry day.  
And old people just grow lonesome  
Waiting for someone to say, "Hello in there, hello."

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<sup>2</sup> See Borling, John (2013). Taps on the Walls. Chicago: Master Wings Publishing LLC.

<sup>3</sup> John Prine, "Hello in There." 1971. © Warner/Chappell Music, Inc.

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"I don't know what to do with my grief," I said.

And she said, "Why do you feel like you need to do something with it?"

I said, "Because I hate it.

I want to get through it.

I want to get over it.

I want to get around it.

I want to be done with it."

She said, "What if your grief isn't something to get done with? What if it's something for you to carry?"

"To carry?!" I said. "I don't want to carry that."

And she said, "What if you don't have a choice?

What if that's the gift that's given you?

What if that's the gift that's given to all of us

Who are getting older, that there's more grief to carry

And we have to figure out how to carry it ourselves

And how to carry it together.

What if we don't have to *do* anything about our grief,

But what if we have to learn how to carry it?"

### (Musical Prayer, cont.)

Me and Loretta, we don't talk much more,

She sits and stares out the back door screen.

All the news just repeats itself

Like some forgotten dream that we've both seen.

Maybe someday I'll go call up Rudy,

We used to work together at the factory.

"But what could I say if he asks, "What's new?"

"Nothing, what's with you? Nothing much to do."

Ya' know old trees just grow stronger,

And old rivers grow wilder ev'ry day.

Old people just grow lonesome

Waiting for someone to say, "Hello in there, hello."

Jesus said, "I won't leave you alone, though I'm leaving you. I give you three things:

I give you a way to walk: walk in love.

I give you a friend, somebody within you, somebody among you. Perhaps we call it the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps we just call it what happens when two or three are gathered. Perhaps it's what we sense sometimes when we're in this room or when we're in a room with somebody we love, or when we're in the room with the family and friends.

And Jesus says, "I give you a promise that I'm coming back but not in the way that you can see me but in a different way that I'll be saying hello."

Jesus gives us three things and I puzzle. I puzzle over what it all means, how to make sense of it. And my mind can't make sense of it. I don't know what to *do* with that. I struggle, as perhaps you do as well, in my own grief in my own life and in the old and the lives of our world now what to do with it.

And I spin and I turn and I try to make sense of what Jesus means and how He is here with us.

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At another impossible time for people to connect with each other and find anything of God's presence and love, they found a new way to show care and love with one another – isolated, alone, scared, lost, hungry as they were. They shared those simple taps. They shared them with coughs and sweeps of the broom. They shared them with knocks on the wall. Knocks with a spoon. They shared them in so many different ways. They shared language. They shared hope. They shared their names.

Their names: to say I'm alive and I'm here right now.

*[Knocks in pairs of repetitions]* " – 3, 5 – 1, 5 – 4, 4 – 1, 5 – 4, 2 – " ("Peter").

I invite you and me today to do the things that we don't know how to do so well -- and that's to take from you today and from the service and into your week ahead -- a time just to place your hand, perhaps upon your heart, perhaps on your neck, perhaps there on your wrists -- and to listen for the heartbeat within you. I invite you to take some time and, perhaps on your own time, to tap out your own name, aloud or on your own hands. I invite you to listen with me to how it is with you. And I invite us as a community together to listen together to who is knocking at the doors of *your* life and of mine seeking a connection. I invite you to listen with me, to listen to who is knocking on the doors of our church for a place to find a friendly voice, an outstretched hand, an expression of care. I invite us to be a community together that listens anew to the 'hello' in here, the 'hello' out there, and to hear and to be transformed by a new language of love.

Perhaps what Jesus means all along the time and all along the way is this: "I've shown up here. Can't you see me? You've been looking all out there. You've been looking in your mind, you've been looking in your confusion. I'm here. This is where I live. This is where I dwell." Here within us and among us, let's open up our lives to the love that is in the room, the love that is ours to take and to share.

### (Musical prayer, cont.)

So if you're walking down the street sometime  
See some hollow, ancient eyes  
Please don't just pass them by and stare  
Like you just don't care, say, "Hello in there, hello."

### Congregational Response

Hello in there, hello.  
Hello in there, hello.  
Hello in there, hello.  
Hello in there, hello

For the word of God in scripture,  
For the word of God among us,  
For the word of God within us,  
Thanks be to God.

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Transcribed by Beth Bartholomew from [www.universityucc.org/Sermons/2017/06/8/2017](http://www.universityucc.org/Sermons/2017/06/8/2017)