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It's Graduation & Scholarship Sunday! We celebrate our graduates today because we want them to know we'll continue to pray for, love and support them. Our hope is that this church will always be a place of love, acceptance, safety and security. Yes, we celebrate our graduates' accomplishments; but, at the same time we look to their future with hopes and dreams and a tad bit of fear and in trepidation! What's next? The next steps are HUGE steps! Steps into THE great unknown. High school, college, the workforce. Remember your graduation? I remember the day my dad moved me to Illinois State University for my freshman year. Checked in, unloaded the car, waited for the next available elevator, waited some more and then headed up to floor 9 of Atkin-Colby Residence Hall. What I'd planned, pre-registered, packed and prepared for was all being set in motion. Before that day, I couldn't wait to start college. On to life's next chapter until the day actually arrived! I was EXCITED and TERRIFIED all at the same time. Dad didn't seem to notice my angst! He was a git r' done kinda guy. He delivered me and my stuff, said goodbye and left. No asking when I'd be home next. No call me (he always said: if you EVER do anything that lands you in jail, you'll sit there! Don't call me.) No- let me know how it goes. No hug, no kiss, nothing but goodbye. There I was, left, on my own to pursue my dreams. I remember busying myself. I unpacked. I met my dormmates. Honestly, I kept busy. My mind raced! It was fear, the fear of all the unknowns! Where were my classes? Would I get along with my roomie? Could I do this? Would I have enough money? Yes, my heart was happy but honestly, my heart was troubled by all the unknowns.

Remember a time when you had a troubled heart? Maybe you're here with a troubled heart. But, then you might say: really, Pastor, it's graduation and scholarship Sunday. Don't dash the graduates hopes and dreams! Why are you talking about a troubled heart? Life's reality is: at times we all have troubled hearts! Transition times make us even more prone. So, maybe it's good we figure out a faithful response. Isn't church one of the place we do that? That's the reason we're talking about troubled hearts. Let's be real and really honest. Life's just like John Pavlovitz described in his article “Dear Church Here's Why People Are Leaving?” We spend our days with a front row seat to human right atrocities, to growing movements of cruelty, to unprecedented religious hypocrisy, and political leaders who oppose the heart of Jesus. We live with the collateral damage of seeing people we love abandon compassion and decency. People are growing more and more callous to the already vulnerable. We see in our daily lives and on the news and across our timelines and in our communities, exactly this kind of wickedness and toxicity. So, we come to church to wrestle with our reality; to find hope, peace, joy and love in life, God's news is always good news!

Today's scripture has us hearing how Jesus comforted his disciples. That was then! The real issue is: do we really think Jesus can comfort us, now? Jesus knew he was going to leave them. His leaving's not at all like our graduates leaving for life's next chapter. Jesus is walking the path to his suffering, crucifixion death and resurrection. He assures them like he assures us he's going to prepare a place for them in heaven where he'll mediate on our behalf before God. So, whatever we ask for on earth in Jesus' name will be given. Do not let your heart be troubled! Don't lose courage or confidence in God. Believe and keep on believing. Jesus knows he will suffer, die, and be resurrected to prove he's the world's Savior. That's why he says, I go

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to prepare a place for you. I'll come back to assure you of your blessedness. My grace and my loving Spirit will keep you in the faith. All this to say: hearts were troubled then, too. Uncertainty then just like there's uncertainty now. We have an advantage over his disciples. We know Jesus made a resurrection return but Jesus ascended back to God in heaven a very long time ago. So, can Jesus still speak to our hearts TODAY? Because troubled hearts hurt. What's hurting your heart? Our heart hurts for those affected by the flooding. Family issues, health concerns, relationship struggles, work issues hurt our heart. The state of our state, nation or denomination; that's a HUGE heart hurt. And, then there's global warming, climate change, homelessness, violence, public shootings, immigration issues and all the challenges of accessing affordable health care, especially mental health care. Hurts my heart to think of higher taxes. Political leader's greed and corruption hurts everyone's hearts just like all the ways the media polarizes us hurt. “Do NOT let your hearts be troubled.”

Easy for you to say, Jesus. Yours is a heavenly perspective. What do you think Jesus thinks of our world today? Not all of it's bright and beautiful, like our Creator God intended? But, can we hear Jesus say do not let your hearts be troubled? Now? Today? In our world? My friends, the good news is: God knows this world's a broken, hurting place. It's why God sent Jesus to reconcile and redeem it all! “Do NOT let your hearts be troubled.” Jesus of all people can say it! Remember what he went through. He's the baby who escaped death at the hands of the oppressive Roman Emperor Herod. He preached in his hometown and his own people tried to throw him off a cliff. Now, he's trying to comfort his disciples because he's about to suffer and die crucified on a cross AGAIN at the hands of his own people. Jesus knew his disciples heart's were troubled just like he knows our hearts hurt, too. What's troubling your hearts today? Do you believe Jesus can help? Trusting God like Jesus trusted God is just so hard to do! But, he said what he said for two very specific reasons. The first reason is troubled hearts aren't healthy! The New Testament was originally written in Greek. The Greek word for “troubled” means disturbed or anxious. Jesus is really saying: Do not be disturbed. DO NOT BE ANXIOUS! Again, easy to say: hard to do! What's happening in our world's scary but anxiety's different than fear! Fear's our reaction to immediate danger. We're hiking at Starved Rock and we see a snake! That's fear. Fear serves a good purpose! Fear makes us run from the snake. Fear might cause us to hurt the snake! Safe to say; fear motivates us to protect ourselves. After we escape the danger, our fear goes away. Fear might reoccur when we remember the snake; but when the danger disappears; our fear disappears too. Anxiety is different. Anxiety is the kind of fear that won't let go. Anxiety doesn't empty tomorrow of its sorrows; it empties today of its strength. Anxiety is the fear of a threat, of perceived danger for which we have no control. Doesn't even have to be a real threat, just a perceived threat. We see a snake, we're afraid. Fear causes us to step away. But, if we're locked in a cage with a snake, fear turns to anxiety because we have no way of escaping or coping with the danger. We're anxious until we escape the danger. The biggest difference between fear and anxiety is this: fear comes and goes depending on the circumstances; but, anxiety hangs on! Another difference between fear and anxiety is that fear saves us, anxiety harms us. Fear saves us by motivating us to move away from danger.

Anxiety immobilizes us. Anxiety makes it difficult to sleep. Anxiety causes all sorts of

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health issues like depression and panic attacks. A little anxiety motivates; but, more than a little anxiety is hard to overcome. If we're someone who has anxiety; we know. It's exhausting trying to escape the perceived danger. Anxiety feels like we're a hamster stuck on a wheel and there's no getting off! We run day and night with no resolve! So, are there legitimate reasons to be anxious? OF COURSE! We're anxious when we fear a danger over which we have no control. Frankly, danger over which we have no control pretty much describes the world we live in! World Trade Center victims had no control over the planes that flew into them. Public shooting victims had no chance to dodge the bullets. Cancer's diagnosed and we're anxious about our treatment's success? And, if it's successfully treated, will it come back? This weather is strange! Is it global warming? Will it ever stop raining so planting can happen? Will I succeed in high school or college? Absolutely, there are NO shortages of reasons to be anxious! And, it's a real and relevant issue of our FAITH! What can we do?

If anxiety is you; talk to your doctor. Your doctor can identify if your anxiety is at a level of concern. Counseling can help, too. Sometimes, counseling combined with medication more successfully manages the anxiety. Counseling gives strategies to alleviate the symptoms. As your spiritual advisor; I'm also suggesting Jesus has an answer, too. But, first I want to be sure you hear this. Do NOT rule out a Dr., counselor and medication. God gifts trained people to help us. God gifts trained scientists who study medications and their efficacy. But, hear Jesus' advice. "Do not let your hearts be troubled." "Believe in God, believe also in me." I feel like I learned this the hard way so I wanna share how I know Jesus can help. You see, in my college days I walked away from my faith. I stopped believing in God. Took my own path toward securing my future! Went in search of places of love, acceptance, safety and security. I tried the silliest, most unhealthy things to make my troubled heart happy; but the happiness was fleeting and temporary. Sometimes my search for happiness lead to poor choices for which I suffered the consequences! Why? Because I was too stubborn to ASK God. I didn't want to believe in God any more. I'd walked away from my faith. Now I see why I felt so alone. Now I see how troubled my heart really was. I look back on that time and I realize without Jesus my heart would always be troubled!

Yes, I got my Master's degree but I did it with a troubled heart. And, now I know I didn't have to. Just ASK. Here Jesus say: come to me all you who are weary and heavy burdened and I'll give you rest. Just ASK! In fact, he promised that if we ask for anything in his name, he'll do it. I didn't ask! That's why I'm saying what I'm saying to you today. Got a troubled heart? ASK JESUS to help you. Speak his name. Jesus. Tell him what's happening. Don't wait to you're at your ropes' end, surrender your pride. You'll never be in a place where you can't call on the name of Jesus. ASK. Believe! Every time we feel our heart hurting! ASK Jesus for help! Doesn't even have to be in church. DO NOT LET your heart be troubled. Asking Jesus puts your troubled heart in his. His heart's a place of peace even though everything around you maybe anything BUT peace. I feel like I need to warn you, thought. ASKING Jesus may or may NOT change your circumstances but ASKING WILL ALWAYS change your heart! My friends, DO NOT LET YOUR HEARTS BE TROUBLED! Believe in God. Believe in Jesus! Jesus always prepares a place for us, places of love, acceptance, safety and security; just like we feel here today. Jesus is God's good news. A place of peace for our entire life! He'll make all

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the difference in the way we see and experience this crazy world.

It's the reason I claim the 4th chapter of Philippians as my life verse and you should, too. It says: “rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus. Dear Ottawa First friends: may yours be a guarded heart and mind. Believe. Ask and know a place of peace in Jesus Christ!