

## **“Too Close for Comfort”**

John 14

Pentecost/Prof. of Faith

Gordon Wiersma 5/23/10

Of course this sermon is intended for all of us – but on this day when Cecily and Megan and Avery and Jon and Simon and Gabe have made profession of faith, I’ve been thinking of them in particular, and thinking about all of our youths – coming through middle school and high school – in GIFT class – some making profession of faith, some not yet – all valued as part of this church family. And I was thinking for y’all youths that this is a time in life when your personal space is an important thing, right? You’re becoming more independent and you need to define your own kind of boundaries: with your parents – your own stuff, your own relationships - your independence and individuality – I was thinking perhaps that’s all summed up these days with FACEBOOK! You have to decide: will your parents be your Facebook friends or not? Can they post things on your Wall or not? What space do you need? Although I thought of another image too – and I know I will be showing my age by using an example from Seinfeld back in the 90s... but there was a “close-talker” episode on Seinfeld that I found quite hilarious – (you can google ‘Seinfeld close-talker’ to watch it on

YouTube) – the plot line of the episode is about a person that talks way too close to everyone – right up in peoples’ faces – which makes everyone quite uncomfortable. What if your parents did that with you or with your friends? Or to you in front of your friends? I can imagine you dying of embarrassment. Because you value your personal space – and actually we all do.

Last week during worship I was praying in unison with the congregation – as we were praying, a particular line really got my attention – the prayer said: ‘may our worship today enable us to **experience the breath of your Spirit in our bodies**’ I thought – ‘wow – really? – “in our bodies”?! I might have written the prayer to say: ‘in our lives’ or ‘in our hearts’ –...but “in our bodies”?! – that’s very, very close’. That’s what I thought while I was praying – how does that sound to you? : **experience the breath of your Spirit in our bodies**. Is that too close...perhaps invading your personal space? And then in the Gospel today, we hear about the gift of the Holy Spirit that the Father/Mother gives through Christ – and Jesus says ‘the Spirit will be with you forever and the Spirit will be **IN** you.’ That’s close, right? Is that violating your comfort zone? Might the Holy Spirit so close, in us - make you, me, us...uncomfortable?

And what I simply want to say to you youths today is YES – that’s right – the presence of God in your life, the breath of the Spirit in your body, will make you uncomfortable; YES. And what I hope you can see with me, is that being uncomfortable is a good thing – not a close-talker thing, or an invading your personal space thing, but a presence, a promise, a discomfort that you and I and we all need.

Of course, saying that the Holy Spirit makes you uncomfortable isn’t the whole story – there are many places in scripture that speak of God as a source of Comfort. In fact, right here in this passage in v.16, when it says the Holy Spirit is our Advocate, another translation of that is Comforter! So clearly Comfort can be a good thing in your relationship with God. But today what I want to say is that comfort is different than being comfortable – and that what the Spirit gives to you, what you need, is not to be comfortable but to have Peace – and those are very different things –because Peace can involve discomfort too...the Spirit making us uncomfortable.

That’s the idea I’ve been hearing in this passage, and so this week it sure seemed like everywhere I looked someone was talking about how part of faith in God is about God making us uncomfortable: having breakfast with a friend, he said how faith isn’t about people just being pleasant to one another,

it's being open to persons and ideas that God will use to challenge us and change us; then I read an essay this week that said the point of good literature and good theology should be to make us uncomfortable with the assumptions we make about life and the way we live; and then I saw a report about the Summit on Racism that was held this past week here in Holland, with many Hope Church folks attending. The report in the paper told how one of the main speakers said: 'if we talk about race and racism, we will start to get uncomfortable', and that that's a good thing! It's a necessary thing, to get uncomfortable. We need to be willing to be taken beyond our comfort zone, to be uncomfortable so that we can then receive and offer a better way – a way of truth and healing and life.

So I've been noticing that 'uncomfortable' theme this week, and thought it was good to share with you, our young people of Hope Church: that faith is sometimes about being uncomfortable. And sharing it with you not as a "AHA – in your face – I want to make you uncomfortable" sort of thing, portraying you as clueless young people with so much to learn...! – not that way at all. I want to say it and for you to hear this uncomfortable word as a part of this community, among people who love you, who are so grateful for and proud of you – and for you to know it's what we all need and are

called to, to live with this Spirit of discomfort. The voices in this world that tell you – ‘just be comfortable, just take care of yourself, just play it safe’ – those are strong voices, and easy to follow, but it’s not the voice of the Spirit of God who gave you life and who wants true life for you. It takes courage to be willing to be uncomfortable, to be challenged, to seek and believe the truth, to grow and change, to love and serve – but it is the discomfort of the Spirit in your life that leads to Peace: peace which is a sense about your life that you know who you are as a child of God; peace that grounds you in living your life in gratitude to a God who loves you; peace that is the strength of living with hope and integrity, with joy and purpose. You need that Peace, because it’s not easy to choose to be uncomfortable: when others say what you know is wrong but you will not join in – when you speak out for those who don’t have a voice - when you act to care for others and this earth - when you are willing to claim and live your faith - when you believe you have gifts to use - when you know there are truths to learn and a purpose to live – that is not always comfortable, but it is the way of God’s true peace – the breath of the Spirit in your body – close – real – within you, as you live as God created you to be.

For you, my dear youths – for all of us – if we think we’ve signed up for some sort of distant God with a faith to make us comfortable...then Pentecost Sunday tells us otherwise – the Holy Spirit stirs things up and calls all, young and old, women and men, to be prophets – living out the word of God in ways that afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted. And that’s a good thing, because it’s the truth: the Spirit is in you to make you uncomfortable with what is deadly and instead to have your gifts flourish into life - to give you something much better than being comfortable. Jesus says, no need to be afraid – my Spirit is with you to discomfort you into great things – like living God’s love and grace and peace, with the Spirit in every breath. AMEN.