

Scripture Reading:

John 20:19-31 New Living Translation (NLT)

Jesus Appears to His Disciples

19 That Sunday evening[a] the disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Suddenly, Jesus was standing there among them! “Peace be with you,” he said. 20 As he spoke, he showed them the wounds in his hands and his side. They were filled with joy when they saw the Lord! 21 Again he said, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.” 22 Then he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive anyone’s sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.” 24 One of the twelve disciples, Thomas (nicknamed the Twin),[b] was not with the others when Jesus came. 25 They told him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he replied, “I won’t believe it unless I see the nail wounds in his hands, put my fingers into them, and place my hand into the wound in his side.” 26 Eight days later the disciples were together again, and this time Thomas was with them. The doors were locked; but suddenly, as before, Jesus was standing among them. “Peace be with you,” he said. 27 Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and look at my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don’t be faithless any longer. Believe!” 28 “My Lord and my God!” Thomas exclaimed. 29 Then Jesus told him, “You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me.” 30 The disciples saw Jesus do many other miraculous signs in addition to the ones recorded in this book. 31 But these are written so that you may continue to believe[c] that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life by the power of his name.

Message: Fake Flowers Just Won't Do

As you remember from last week, it was the evening of the first Easter Sunday. Earlier that morning Peter and John had been to the tomb. They had discovered it was empty. They saw the strips of linen as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. It was a puzzling mystery. They knew something important had happened but they were not sure what. So they returned to the city.

Mary, however, stayed behind. And she had a somewhat mystical experience. Weeping, she bent over once more to look into the tomb and she saw what appeared to be two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. Then immediately afterward she had an encounter with a stranger that in her grief she mistook for the gardener. Then he called her name and she discovered it wasn't the gardener at all. It was the Master risen from the grave. She ran back to tell Peter and John and the other disciples about her experience.

That evening the disciples were still processing all this. John tells us they were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders. That's interesting. We make a big deal about Easter Sunday morning, but that evening, the disciples were all cowering in fear. Obviously some questions still remained, some unrest still present.

The tomb was empty, but what did that prove? Maybe someone had stolen his body.

So, there they were, these followers of Jesus, behind those locked doors, speaking in whispers, confused, frightened, like sheep without a shepherd. Then, says our lesson for today, "Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!' After he said this, he showed them his hands and side." Then John adds these words, "The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord."

He spoke to them: "Peace be with you!" Then he showed them his hands and side. There was no longer any doubt. This was their Master, risen from the grave. And they were overjoyed.

If the Gospel had concluded on Easter Sunday morning with the empty tomb and the appearance of the stranger to Mary, there might be some question about the validity of the resurrection. Can you imagine what we would say today?- "Christ has died. We hope that Christ will come again..." It is Easter Sunday evening that clinches the deal. It is the joy that the disciples experienced behind those locked doors doors bolted with fear and doubt and misgivings it is that joy that quiets our doubts, our fears, our misgivings. There was no question. He is alive, just as he said.

Let's deal with this beautiful story this morning and apply this experience to our lives. **Let's begin with those locked doors.** Why were they locked? Out of fear, of course. Jesus had been put to death by his enemies. Would his enemies now turn their hatred toward his followers? This is a reasonable question. Think about it- fear, much like many are experiencing today, being locked away- avoiding contact with others out of fear of what the results may be.

This ties in well with a humorous story that I read about a couple who were vacationing. The wife expressed her concern about camping because of bears and said she would feel more comfortable in a motel. The husband said that he'd like to camp, but, to calm her concerns, they'd talk to the park ranger to see what the likelihood of a bear encounter would be.

The ranger told them, "Well, we haven't seen any grizzlies in this area so far this year, or black bears, for that matter."

The wife shrieked, "There are two types of bears out here? How can you tell the difference? Which one is more dangerous?"

The ranger replied, "Well, that's easy, see, if the bear chases you up the tree and it comes up after you, it's a black bear. If it shakes the tree until you fall out, it's a grizzly."

The wife decided that the motel room would work quite nicely. (2)

I suspect that many of you think her reaction was quite reasonable. Even though bear attacks don't happen very often, just the thought is quite scary. She might miss some of the thrill of being closer to nature, but we can understand her reaction.

Fear is quite debilitating. Fear keeps us from living our lives openly and joyfully. It keeps us running when our real need is to rest and relax.

Think about how often Jesus says, "Do not be afraid."

In Luke's telling of this same story, the disciples are terrified when Jesus suddenly appears in their midst. They think he is a ghost (Luke 24:36-39). No wonder he has to say to them, "Peace be with you!" That's what peace is, the absence of fear, or at least it is fear under control. As long as we are in this world there will be things to fear. That's part of the human condition. But Christ helps us keep our fears under control. Christ helps us delineate reasonable fears from unreasonable fears. It is fear that causes us to resent other people that causes us to lash out in anger and envy. If we could keep our fears under control we would live more Christ-like lives.

The disciples were behind locked doors out of fear from Jesus' enemies. Jesus appears in the midst of them and says, "Peace be with you!"

"Peace be with you." That was a common greeting and probably one he had spoken to them many times. But in this situation it was more than a greeting. It was a message that they needed to hear.

Jesus means for his followers to have peace. That's the first thing we need to see. As the popular preacher Adam Hamilton has said, "The resurrected Jesus didn't promise wealth or health or prosperity or power; what he promised was peace."

I confess to you that I have known some Christians who have anything but peace.

Peace within would seem to be a no-brainer for followers of Jesus. “Find something bigger than yourself to believe in.” That is the ultimate key to peace of mind.

This brings us to the second thing we need to see: our greatest need is peace.

Toward the end of World War II, Harry S. Truman, then President, was asked how he was able to keep his cool under the pressures of his office. He said that he had a “foxhole” in his mind and that just as, in combat, the infantryman could scramble into his foxhole to take cover, he relied on a “mental foxhole” in times of stress.

The philosopher Marcus Aurelius shared this conviction. He believed devoutly that a human being needed the capacity to retreat within himself to acquire peace of mind and inner renewal.

How do you find peace of mind? If you are smart, you will find peace in the presence of the risen Christ. That is the only place where true peace is available.

The true secret of peace comes from within.

There is the story about about Thelma who loves a beautiful, well manicured yard complete with roses and other assorted flowers. You know one of those yards that consistently wins “Yard of the Month”. The Thelma I am referring to has a fake garden. The thing is, Thelma wants a pretty yard without all the hard work that a garden requires, so she plants plastic flowers in her yard. The flowers look beautiful, and from a distance, no one can tell that they aren't real. But there are no honeybees in Thelma's garden. The bees learned a long time ago that although her flowers look pretty, they have no flavor or nourishment to them. We have received real flowers- the ones that came with a sacrifice. The hard work has already been done and we can rest assured in the peace that has been shared with us- “Peace be with you”. Amen