

Easter 2 Year A 2020
April 19, 2020
Sermon

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

When we encounter the disciples in today's gospel reading, we find them locked up in a house, with all the doors closed because they are afraid. They're worried about their families, their loved ones, and one another. Their lives are in danger.

Perhaps this sounds familiar. Here we are—each sitting in our own homes, doors locked, afraid to venture out into public, watching church videos on our computers because we cannot surround ourselves with other people of faith. We, too, worry about our friends and families, we are afraid for their health and safety, and we just want everything to be okay again—we want everything to go back to normal.

Our situation today in the midst of the coronavirus is not all that different from the situation of the disciples in those first days after Jesus was crucified and rose from the dead. The reasons that we're locked away and hunkered down are obviously different, but I imagine that the emotions and reactions that we're having now aren't all that different from those of the disciples.

Not only are we afraid and worried about our loved ones, but there's also a sense of hopelessness that comes with being locked away. We're worried about whether or not we'll be alive and well tomorrow, but we also have quite a few more concerns about the future. We don't know how long the governor's orders will continue—will they just go until April 30th, will they be extended 2 more weeks, or another month or two? And what will happen when we are finally able to go out again? What will our gatherings look like then? Will we still have to limit our interactions and contact with one another? And for how long? What about students that had planned on attending prom, or were going to celebrate graduation this spring? What about those entering college this year and next? What about employees—will there be jobs available when all this is over? Will small businesses be able to reopen? The questions and uncertainties are endless, and as we become overwhelmed with this crisis, we begin to lose hope that we'll ever get back out into the world again.

The disciples were likely beginning to lose hope too. We heard it in our gospel reading a couple weeks before Easter. As Jesus was finally preparing to visit Mary and Martha after Lazarus died, many of the disciples were afraid to travel so near to Jerusalem, because it would most certainly lead to death. And Thomas appears in that story too. It is Thomas who ultimately says, "Let us also go [with Jesus], that we may die with him." The disciples believed from the beginning of this trip into Jerusalem that they were in danger, and that all hope was lost. At the very least, Thomas was pretty sure that he and the disciples wouldn't be making it out of Jerusalem alive.

In the midst of both of these situations—the disciples' and ours—we are afraid, and hopeless, and alone. But even when all the doors are locked and we are hunkered down inside our homes, and when we least expect it, Jesus comes into our lives and stands among us, proclaiming, "Peace be with you." In the depths of our despair, our grief, and our pain, Christ comes to us, bringing us peace.

Jesus shows up in times like these, when we are hopeless and afraid, and Jesus brings us peace. Jesus reminds us that he knows our suffering and our pain, and that as we journey through these difficult times, we are never alone. Jesus promises to be near to us.

But that's not all that happened on that Easter night. "When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

Not only does Jesus come to the disciples amidst their fear and bring them peace, but he also bestows upon them the gift of the Holy Spirit who will be with the disciples forever as their advocate and guide.

And this was especially important for the disciples, because after the resurrected Jesus came to meet the disciples in their locked room, their world would never be the same. They don't get to go back to their old jobs as fishermen and tax collectors. They don't get to follow Jesus around again as he teaches. Now they face a "new normal", a life in which they have to navigate the world one day at a time, figuring it out as they go along.

This will be true for us too. When we venture back out into the world, things will be different. We will need to be continually mindful about our contact with one another, and making sure that we use healthy precautions to avoid spreading germs. Relationships may change—some relationships will not have survived the time apart, others may have grown over this time, and we will need to learn to balance our relationships and our roles in society. Churches will be different—we may see some new faces when we gather again, others may have fallen away from the church over this time. As many people have discovered new ways to interact with one another in this time, and as the church has faced the need to innovate, we have learned new skills, and we have to consider how we'll bring those into the future.

Just like other tragedies throughout history, the coronavirus and this time of isolation will affect us all. Whether we contract the virus, or someone we know gets it or dies from it, or if we've simply been impacted from spending so long away from others, we have all shared in this experience in some way. And we cannot erase these experiences, or simply hit the "reset button" to return to life before the virus. Life will be different after the coronavirus has run its course.

But even though things will be different, things will be okay. Jesus promised the disciples that the Holy Spirit would be with them as they ventured back out into the world as part of God's mission. And we also have received this same gift of the Holy Spirit in baptism.

We also have received this same gift of the Holy Spirit in baptism. Jesus promises us that the Holy Spirit will be with us in the days, and weeks, and months ahead. The Spirit will guide us through this time and into the future. In all the uncertainties and despair that we now face, the Holy Spirit is given to us to dispel our fears, to call to us through the Word, and to keep us steadfast in our faith. The Holy Spirit strengthens us to face whatever may lie ahead.

God in Christ brings us peace amidst our fears and anxieties, and God the Holy Spirit will be our guide as we face the uncertainties of the future. And so, like the disciples on that first Easter night, let us find hope in the presence of Christ and in the gift of the Holy Spirit. May God's peace be with you. Amen.