

“Peace in the Midst of Fear”

Introduction: We will return shortly to our exploration of the Sermon on the Mount, but I’d like to remain in the mood of resurrection for the next few weeks and consider with you a few of the early, post-resurrection appearances of Jesus. There are a half dozen or so of these appearances and I so appreciate them primarily because of the attitude we see in Jesus. Instead of going around thumping his chest and saying, “I told you so” to whoever would listen, or doing some divine version of a “touchdown dance” (he had, after all, just scored an incredible victory over death!), Jesus quietly, and in a systematic way, sought out his followers and met them where they were. And most, frankly, were in hard places!

Sometimes we forget that the first Easter was not all joy and flowers and fancy outfits but included grief and fear and frustration and disillusionment and doubt. These, in fact, are many of the same emotions that many followers of Jesus are experiencing today, brought on by issues ranging from random violence to racial strife to political turmoil to a variety of health scares. Where, in these places, do we need Jesus to meet us? Where do we need to know that he is walking with us through a life that seems uncomfortably close to the valley of the shadow of death? How do we need our hope to be restored?

Let’s begin with the evening of resurrection day when we find the disciples of Jesus locked in a room, scared for their lives. [READ]

I. Behind Locked Doors

A. Let’s begin for a moment with Luke’s description of events. After he describes what went on at the tomb of Jesus, he tells of two Jesus followers who, that afternoon, were making their way back home to a village called Emmaus. They were terribly confused and disillusioned. Their hope that Jesus was the one who would rescue Israel from her oppressors seemed to have gone up in smoke. But Jesus appeared alongside them and eventually, as he broke bread with them at their table, their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. Their hope rekindled, Luke reports that these two quickly made the seven-mile trip back to Jerusalem and found their way to a room where a group of disciples had gathered and were trying to get a handle on Peter’s report that Jesus was indeed alive again (Lk. 24:13-35). These two joined in that discussion. The whole thing must have felt a bit like a newsroom into which various reports of an event were pouring in and those there were trying to make sense of them.

B. Evidently this pair knew the password they needed to give to gain entrance to this room because John tells us that the disciples of Jesus had gathered in this room and locked the doors out of fear of the Jewish leaders who, in concert with the Roman authorities, had put Jesus to death. The disciples reasoned, understandably so, that if these powerful men had done this to Jesus, that they might now come after his followers, in a kind of sweeping up operation, and do the same to them. They might also have been fearful of the ridicule and scorn that friends and neighbors could have directed toward them. “You said this guy was wonderful and powerful, you believed he was the Messiah, well, where is your hero?!” And, at an even deeper level, they might also have been afraid of Jesus himself. If the reports were true, and Jesus was alive, how would he respond to the fact that they had all abandoned him, just like he told them they would . . . and they had assured him they would not?! Could they even face him?

C. It's worth pausing and asking, where might fear be present in your life right now? How might fear be causing you to lock the doors of your heart against the presence of God in your life, perhaps without even knowing it? How might you have locked the door of your heart to God because of a fear of what's happening in the world? Where might you be afraid of what your neighbor or family member might think if they knew you were a follower of Jesus? Where might you fear that God is somehow going to punish you because both you and he know that you haven't exactly lived a very virtuous life? How might any of those places of fear be preventing you from opening the door of your life to Jesus?

D. Well, the good news is that Jesus doesn't need a password to gain entry to our life! As we see, all of a sudden, Jesus is there, standing in the room among them. As Ruth Haley Barton observes, although Jesus never pushes his way into our lives, he does know our fears, and how they might prevent us, or freeze us, from opening the door to him, but he is not limited by our limitations. He is able to come alongside us, even when we try to lock him out. And when he does, he often does so gently. "Shalom," is his first word, not "you chumps" or "I told you so," but "peace be with you." It's a word that indicates well-being, harmony. It's a word that actually compliments the last word Jesus spoke on the cross, "It is finished," as shalom declares the result of that work of Jesus on the cross – peace with God, peace with ourselves, peace with our neighbor, and peace with creation. It's a peace he's inviting his followers, then and now, to live within as we come to experience and enjoy his presence. Where do you need him to say "peace" to you?

## II. Scars that Transform

A. In addition to a word to his disciples, Jesus does a little show and tell. He shows them his hands and his side, his hands where the nails went in, and his side where the soldier's spear pierced. He shows them, in other words, his scars.

Illustration: Some of you know that I've had a few episodes of melanoma over the years which, fortunately, have been taken care of through minor surgery. Before one I recall the nurse saying to me, "Now you know this incision is going to leave a scar." To which I thought, that's really fine, as long as the cancer part gets taken away! And in fact, the scar is a reminder, each time I look in the mirror, of the healing that my doctor, by the grace of God, was able to bring about.

Another doctor, a very gifted and faith-filled orthopedic surgeon, Dr. Eric Gokcen, operates on conditions like clubfoot and other treatable disabilities that children have, at a hospital in Ethiopia named CURE. The surgeries literally transform the lives of these children, but, as Gokcen remarks, you can't have surgery without a scar. And then, in a reflection he calls "The beauty of a scar," he draws the connection with Jesus:

As I pondered this [text], I realized that the resurrected Jesus still had scars. I always thought His body would be perfect in its resurrected state. But, clearly, His scars remained. They are evidence of the life He brought . . . Just as surgical scars remind patients of a physical change in their lives, Jesus's scars remind us of the spiritual change in the lives of those who believe.

B. Jesus' scars remind us of the love he extends to us on the cross. They confirmed for his early followers that the one who had been crucified was alive again, and that they could lay down their fear. As John puts it in his first letter: perfect love (which the cross is) drives out fear (1 John 4:18).

### III. People that Go

A. Having spoken a word of peace, having given his disciples visual assurance of the sacrifice he made for them, Jesus finishes by calling them to extend his peace to others. They were not to remain hidden from the world, nor simply to receive his peace for themselves. “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” As John Piper once put it, we’re not to be cul-de-sacs of God’s hospitality—the place where it ends—but conduits—those through whom God’s hospitality extends. We are to go; we are sent ones.

B. As we consider this for a moment, it’s helpful to ask: How was Jesus sent to us? He came to us as a servant who rolled up his sleeves and spent time with all kinds of people in all kinds of ways. He also came in the power and companionship of the Holy Spirit, which, in a few weeks at Pentecost, we’ll remember that he shares with us. Jesus anticipates this coming gift of the Spirit in what seems like a symbolic act of breathing on his disciples. What is important is that he does not intend to leave them, or us, as orphans, but plans on walking with us and enabling us to live out what he’s called us to do.

C. And then, as we proclaim this message of peace, this message of healing, this message of forgiveness, in both word and deed, we don’t determine who receives it, but God uses our proclamation to move people to respond to this gift (v. 23). So may God by his Spirit free us from our fears by filling us with his peace that then overflows into a thirsty and turbulent world.