

“PEACE BE WITH YOU”

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Text: John 20:19-31 NLT

God’s Word: 1 John 1:1-2:2 NLT

John 20:19-31 (NLT)

¹⁹ That Sunday evening 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), 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.

On the very first Easter morning only Mary Magdalene had seen the Risen Christ. When she had gotten to the tomb and found that the stone had been rolled away, she went and told Peter and John about it. Peter and John came running and believed that "someone" had indeed stolen Jesus' body. Then, they went back to where they were hiding.

But, Mary had stayed at the tomb--weeping. And it was there at the tomb that Jesus came to her, called her by name, and she saw Jesus and believed. Jesus instructed Mary to go tell the

disciples what she had seen and heard. And Mary did what Jesus had asked, she *"went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'"* and she told them what He had said to her.

But, apparently the disciples didn't believe Mary. Thomas always gets a bad rap for not believing the other disciples when they told him, *"We have seen the Lord,"* but the other disciples hadn't believed Mary Magdalene when she had told them: *"I have seen the Lord."*

We are all in the same boat on this one, are we not? Unless we experience something for ourselves--we really don't tend to believe it.

So, the first Easter moved along, and when evening came, the disciples were still hiding behind locked doors. We are told that they were filled with fear. They had seen what had happened to Jesus. They had witnessed the horror of Jesus' crucifixion, and they were scared out of their minds that the same people would do the same thing to them. They didn't believe that Jesus had been raised from the dead. They believed that Jesus' body was missing, but they still believed in a dead Jesus, not a Resurrected Jesus. And so they were absolutely terrified. And who could blame them?

And then John tells us that *"Jesus came and stood among them. He said, 'Peace be with you.' After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side."*

And then, something very interesting happens. After Jesus shows the disciples the nail marks on His hands and His side where the Romans pieced Him with a spear, we are told that the disciples finally: *"saw the Lord,"* and then *"they were filled with joy."* And then Jesus said to them again, *"Peace be with you."*

Could it be that in showing His wounds to the disciples, Jesus is not only showing them that He is the same person they saw hanging on a Cross a few days ago, but also that His wounds prove to them that Jesus has overcome the very worst that the world can do to Him? If Jesus can be raised from the dead after having experienced a Roman execution--what else is there to fear?

Jesus has overcome the worst that the world and the devil can do to Him. Therefore, *"Death has been swallowed up in victory. 'Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death is your sting?' The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."* And so Christ can say to the huddled and scared disciples: *"Peace be with you."*

Death is one of the things that people fear the most. In Rudyard Kipling's The Jungle Book Mowgli, the man cub, asks the animals what the most feared thing in the jungle is. He's told that when two animals meet on a narrow path that one of the animals must step aside and let the other animal pass. The animal that steps aside for no one would then be the most feared.

Mowgli wants to know what kind of animal that is. One tells him it's an elephant. Another tells him it's a lion. Finally the wise old owl exclaims: "The most feared thing in the jungle is death. It steps aside for no one." Well, my friends, welcome to the jungle!!!

The disciples lived in a violent society. And we live in a violent society--a violent world as well. There seems to be a war on every corner. We have terrorists blowing up and killing civilians in such seemingly safe places such as train stations, mosques, hotels, and busy city streets, our capital building. Crazy people with guns walk into schools and places of business and shoot anyone who happens to be in the line of fire.

The anxiety level, the fear level is pretty high right now. Jesus said to the first disciples: "*Peace be with you.*" Jesus says to us: "*Peace be with you.*"

Who wouldn't want peace? Isn't this what most sane individuals most desire?

We all need peace, do we not? How can we find it? How can we have it?

On the night before Jesus died in agony He knew what He was facing, yet He still took time to comfort His disciples with the message of peace. In John 14:27 Jesus says: "*Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you. I give to you not as the world gives. Don't be troubled or afraid.*"

What does Jesus mean by this?

How can we live in this world--with all the violence, natural disasters, and death--and be at peace? Certainly the kind of peace Jesus promises and gives is not about living with the absence of trouble. It has nothing to do with circumstances. It is something that is still with us no matter what happens on the outside. We may be in the midst of terrible troubles and still have the peace Jesus gives.

Paul said he learned "*the secret of how to be content in any circumstance...whether being full or hungry or whether having plenty or being poor.*" In Philippians 4:7, Paul talks about "*the peace of God that exceeds all understanding,*" that keeps our "*hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus.*"

Don't you want your heart and mind safe? Isn't that a beautiful thought? Again, the peace that Jesus offers us has nothing to do with tranquility, harmony, and easy living. Instead, we are told that Jesus said to the disciples, "*Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I am sending you.*" What?!!!

"Peace be with you. Now go do what I did--the very thing that got me arrested and killed!!!--Peace be with you." How does that work?

It only works through the power of the Holy Spirit!!! After Jesus said "*Peace be with you...and...As the Father sent me, so I am sending you...He breathed on,*" the disciples, "*the Holy Spirit.*" Jesus doesn't ask the disciples, nor does Jesus ask us to conquer our fears on our

own--He breathes on us the Holy Spirit!!! The presence of the Holy Spirit is the presence of Christ in our lives.

Jesus calls us to the same kind of peace-making that led Him to the Cross. And this kind of peace making is only possible through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Think about it. Jesus didn't come into this world to merely keep the status quo.

Instead, Jesus' peace brings the outcast and the marginalized people back into the fold, and turns the way the world thinks on its ear: "*The first shall be last,*" "*the greatest is the servant.*" So, it is through following Jesus that we find true peace--the peace which transcends all understanding.

It has been said that "by ourselves, humans are not capable of following Jesus; the power of sin is simply too great. By ourselves, we want to fit in, we want to maintain our social status, we want to have privileges and keep our 'good name.'" And God knows this. And so Jesus gives, to those who will believe and receive it, the gift of the Holy Spirit. And this Holy Spirit is Jesus' Spirit, God's Spirit.

Just as God breathed into the nostrils of a human shaped piece of clay in Genesis and made it a living human being, so Jesus having risen from the dead--breathes into our nostrils the breath of life. And when that happens--we become children of God--"*children,*" as the 1st Chapter of John puts it, "*born not from blood nor from human desire or passion, but born from God.*"

In Matthew Chapter 5:9 Jesus says, "*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.*" So there is a correlation between having peace and making peace, is there not? There is a correlation between following Jesus and having peace. There is a correlation between dying to self and living for God and neighbor and having peace. There is a correlation between being born of the Spirit and having peace. There is a correlation between working for the inclusion of the ostracized, loving our enemies, seeking justice for the oppressed, the rejected and the harassed and having the peace which transcends all understanding.

As one person has said, "Jesus' peace invites the lion to see the lamb as a neighbor and friend, the Jew to speak with the Samaritan, and the prostitute to dine with the Pharisee."

This is a new way of living in the world. It is the Kingdom way of living. It is the Jesus way of living. It is the only way which leads to peace. In the eyes of the world it may not make sense. Jesus' peace doesn't aim guns at one another. Jesus' peace doesn't say "an eye for an eye." Jesus' peace doesn't seek revenge. Jesus' peace doesn't drop bombs. Jesus' peace makes disciples and fills those who experiences it "with joy."

Do you have this peace?