

Sermon: Peace Be With You!
Text: John 20:24-31 NLT
God's Word: John 20:19-23 NLT
Date: Sunday, April 16, 2023
Preacher: Rev. Becky Stephens

John 20:24-31 NLT

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 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.

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*"Unless I see," said Thomas, "the nail marks in his hands, [and] put my finger in the wounds left by the nails, and put my hand into his side, I won't believe."*

These are strong words and yet how often do we think the same thing? We love miracles, but we hold back wanting more solid proof. We love the promises of Christ that today you will be with Me in Paradise, but we have that skeptical side too when it comes to us, me, or mine. We assure our friends of God's forgiveness, love, and eternal life, but we fall short ourselves in believing when it is about us. We too are doubting Thomas.

John was anxious to tell this story in John 20 where the disciples were locked up, hidden away in that room where they prayed that the Jews wouldn't find them and crucify them, too! All the amazing days of Jesus' popularity and promise were now just dust and ashes to them, or so they thought. Would this be the end? Would they now scatter to the four winds, go back to fishing, and pack-up this whole business with Jesus as just a memory?

I think John wants those of us who will read this to know that the first disciples had a tough time themselves. The present moment, and its threats and dangers seemed too real, too threatening, too frightening to their fragile spirits.

But in the midst of all of this, Jesus Himself came among them saying, "Peace be with you." PEACE BE WITH YOU! Are these not the words we all need to hear? Isn't this what is missing from our chaotic, hostile, fearful, and angry world? Don't we all need PEACE?

Peace of mind. Peace that penetrates our souls. Peace that things really are going to be alright...peace that God really is in control...peace that we are not all alone in this often difficult and cruel world. We need the peace of Christ before we can even begin to help ourselves, let alone others. And it's real. And it's available. And Jesus is offering it to us over and over and over all the time.

Jesus speaks beautiful words of assurance that He is Who He said He was and that we can really count on His every word of grace, every word of promise, every word from God---Peace Be with You!

We all need to hear these words in our world today! They need to be words that cut through our own feeble faith, our own weak commitments. We need to hear these words from Jesus about how *"I am among you, and I bring you PEACE, a Godly peace that gives rest to your souls no matter where you are or who you are."*

The disciples badly needed this encouragement because they were falling apart. We may think the disciples had it easy and their faith just caught fire immediately after Easter, but we almost had a stillborn church.

Let's remember this if we ever start getting too big for our britches. Let's remember this if we ever think the accomplishments of the Church are because of how great we are. Let's remember this if we ever start to think that this congregation, this movement, this fellowship is all about us!

Jesus had already appeared to the disciples once, well to all of them except Thomas. And here they were eight days later. And they were still a quivering mess of anxiety and fear. The doors were still locked.

They had seen Jesus. Jesus had even breathed on them and said, *"Receive the Holy Spirit."* Surely, they believed, but their faith was so weak, so new, so fragile.

They were still so very much connected to this world. They hadn't yet learned to trust much. They were just infants in the faith. Things were just barely beginning to turn around for them. The dust of the Crucifixion had not yet settled. It was still too new and fresh. Even though there was an empty tomb, and a Risen Christ they were still paralyzed by shock and fear!!!

So, Jesus comes to them again. If He had not, how long would they have stayed locked in that room? Perhaps forever. And without the Presence of Christ, aren't we all, in some ways, locked in our own rooms...afraid to come out and live--really live? Afraid to love...afraid to give too much of ourselves away...afraid of what others might think...afraid we might lose control...afraid we might get hurt...afraid to give our money, our time, our lives for God and for the world?

Remember, it is always Jesus Who first comes to us, not the other way around. We love only because Jesus first loved us. We believe only because Jesus first believed in us. We are saved only because Jesus left Heaven in pursuit of us. We are forgiven because Christ died our death and bought us at a price which is truly priceless and beyond measure. And it can never be paid back. And Jesus is not asking it to be paid back. It's a free gift. It's all in the name of Love. It's all because of a God Who loves us more than we could ever imagine.

Let's allow our minds to wrap around that a bit. Let's allow that to embrace us in our fears and our worries. And nothing can separate us from Christ's love for us! The Bible tells us that *"not death or life, not angels or rulers, not present things or future things, not powers or height or depth, or any other thing,"* can *"separate us from Christ's love."*

Do we believe this? Believing this is what changes and transforms our lives. So, Jesus came to the disciples again. And then, in Chapter 21 we are told that Jesus came yet again.

And that time the disciples had decided to return to fishing after all. They were a miserable bunch, having fished all night and having caught not a guppy, not a perch, not a boot or a tire.

How many times would they have to see the Risen Christ? How many times would they have to be told and reminded that things were different now? They thought Jesus had left them, but Jesus hadn't left them. Jesus would never leave them, nor forsake them.

And so, in the next Chapter Jesus even cooks them breakfast. This shows how fragile our faith is at the beginning, in infancy. Just like the disciples we hide and make excuses why we won't live into what we really do believe. We make excuses as to why we can't give more. We make excuses as to why we can't participate in certain ministries or why we don't have time for this person or that person.

We try and hold onto the world. And when we try and hold onto the world, we separate ourselves, we push away from God. We go fishing and don't catch a thing.

Someone before Christmas was telling me this awful story of how she wouldn't ever go to church anymore or call herself Christian because of some big riff in a church she'd been involved with. All the talk in the world, on my part, didn't seem to penetrate her pain, and anger. And most of us have been there, too. The disciples would not have let Jesus in the door on their own accord, no; He had to appear to them offering the Peace of God for them to deal with it. If Jesus had knocked they would never have let Him in.

This doesn't mean that Christ forces Himself on us, it does show us though, or give us a glimpse of the lengths Christ does and will go to bring us peace. And it also helps us better understand how faith in Christ is all God's doing. It's by grace, lest anyone should boast.

Jesus came to the disciples, opening Himself up, showing them those scars so they could believe on this real level. And eventually they moved out of their room and to the outside, even if it was just to go fishing. But then, they moved some more. And eventually they didn't have to see the scars in order to have peace and faith and to put their faith into action.

We too can get to the point where we don't need proof after proof after proof. But that might take a very long time. Or it may never come. We are all at different places. And sometimes, when we think we are at our strongest, some huge gust of wind comes and blows us completely over. And then, Jesus appears to us again.

The Easter season can be our time to explore the proofs of Jesus' Resurrection and to know in our hearts that our Savior is truly not in the tomb but is Risen just as He said.

But you know, every day is Easter for Christians. Every day is the day that we rejoice over the empty tomb!!! Every day is the day we live into the fact that Jesus is alive. And that because He lives we will live also.