

“As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

As I told you last Sunday, over the next several weeks between now and Pentecost Sunday, we will be looking at the Resurrection Appearances of Jesus. It is my hope that in focusing on these passages we will understand more of what Jesus' followers felt and experienced in those first days after the Resurrection and in turn what those encounters have to tell us today.

Today we look at the Resurrection Appearance of Jesus to the disciples gathered behind a locked door. For some reason that we are not told, Thomas is not part of this group on this Easter Sunday evening. The remaining disciples are huddled behind this locked door – for fear of the Jews.

Despite the news of the resurrection from the women, Peter and the two disciples who have just returned from Emmaus, the disciples are still afraid. Before we think badly of the disciples -- think about it. They are associated with Jesus who was arrested and crucified by the Jewish leaders. They are not sure what to believe about Jesus as not all of them have seen him. It could be a mass hysteria going on. They don't know. So, their fear is understandable. Their fear is reasonable.

An article I read this week said that “The Easter season of alleluias can sometimes seem to leave little room for

our doubts, our fears, and our pain. We tend to forget that for the first disciples, there was fear..."ⁱ

It is in this context that Jesus appears in their midst. The door is not unlocked or opened – but Jesus is just there. If the disciples were not afraid before, they certainly are now.

And Jesus says, Peace be with you. This peace is Shalom. Shalom is “a blessing that connotes more than tranquility, but a deep and holistic sense of well-being -- the kind of peace the world cannot give (14:27).”ⁱⁱ This is EXACTLY what the disciples needed on this Easter Evening. They needed the kind of peace the world cannot give.

And with that bestowing of Peace, Jesus shows them his hands and his side. He shows them that he is not an illusion but that he is indeed the one that had been crucified, who had died and was buried, but that is now alive and standing in front of them.

Jesus has conveyed both Peace and Proof.

It is at this point that the disciples rejoice. They have been given what they so desperately needed.

But Jesus is not finished with them just yet. In addition to Peace and Proof, Jesus gives them Purpose.

Jesus again offers a word of Peace and then commissions the disciples with the Purpose of continuing HIS work. “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

The disciples are not given a new task. They are given the work of continuing what God started in Jesus. Jesus came to save, but he also came to teach and lead and heal. It is this mission that the disciples are given. And they do not have this mission alone, but Jesus gives them the breath of the Spirit to guide and accompany them.

We are two weeks out from Easter. Do you still feel like it is Easter? Every week is a celebration of Easter – or it should be. However, just as the disciples experienced grief and fear, we do as well.

What is keeping you behind locked doors? Do you see the world around us and find threats both real and imagined. WE can find ourselves reluctant to let others know that we follow Christ because of the negativity and caricatures that have become associated with Christianity. We may fear being judged.

Scripture only mentions the disciples fear, but perhaps there was anger as well. Maybe they were angry with God that Jesus wasn't the Messiah they had hoped for.

Maybe we are angry with God. Angry that a loved one with cancer is not healed; angry that a child is lost. Angry that (fill in the blank) has happened.

What does this passage offer us? First it gives us Peace. Jesus offers to us the same Shalom offered to the disciples. It is a Peace that the world does not know. I have often explained to people that there is a difference between Happiness and Joy. Happiness is dependent on things and Joy is dependent only on God. That is also how I see Peace. Peace for the world is a cessation of conflict. Peace for believers is “a deep and holistic sense of well-being.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Jesus also offered Proof to the disciples. Jesus is real. He proved himself real to the disciples. He continues to prove he is real – if we pay attention.

Finally, Jesus gave the disciples as Purpose. They were to continue his work in the world. We have that same Purpose. It is easy for us to forget that. We get so consumed by the stuff of life that our Faith can become a Sunday-thing.

Let me encourage you to take up the Purpose and the gift of the Holy Spirit that Christ offers to us.

Do you know why the Ushers light the candles at the beginning of the Prelude for worship now?

“The light is carried into the worship service as a symbol of Jesus' coming into the presence of (our) worshiping community. ... (The) two candles on the altar to point out that Jesus was both a human being and God. The votive candle held in the hands represent us – that we are here with and to Worship God. The candle on the Pulpit is to recognize the Spirit's role in bringing a Word to us.

Beginning this week, at the end of (each) service, the candles will be extinguished it the light carried out into the world to show that Jesus Christ is for all people everywhere; This symbolizes the light of Jesus Christ going out into the world where believers are to serve" where we are to serve.

Today as we come together at The Lord's Table let us remember that we are his disciples and may we find Peace, Proof and Purpose at this meal. Let us also remember that his death, resurrection and that his grace and salvation is offered for everyone.

ⁱ https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1991

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