5-5-2019 – Message – Fear To Joy

After seeing the empty tomb, going inside and seeing the linen wraps lying empty on the stone where the lifeless body of Jesus had been when the tomb was sealed, scripture states in *John 20: 10 Then they went home.*

We can only imagine the level of fear the disciples were feeling. They had denied and deserted Jesus and they may have been wondering, what happens now?

John records what happened later that day in

John 20: 19 – 20 *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!*

In the scripture passage this morning there are three aspects of human emotion and behavior that John records in regard to what the disciples may have been feeling and their possible response to those feelings.

**1. Fear** *19 That Sunday evening the disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were* ***afraid*** *of the Jewish leaders.*

Can you remember a time in your life when you were afraid?

Maybe it was bad news about a loved one that brought the fear.

Maybe it was a health or financial concern.

Maybe it was the awareness of an impending tragedy, watching an accident happen but being helpless to do anything about the outcome.

Maybe you were caught in the grip of the “what if” game that we often play over and over in our minds.

Fear of the unknown can be debilitating.

How does fear affect you?

I have discovered that fear has certain effects on me.

It can mess up my thinking, effecting my responses

In my mind I can exaggerate the outcomes and consequences

It sometimes causes procrastination or inaction but sometimes I act in haste and then have regret

Then I start looking for ways to fix the situation on my own

It can also take away necessary sleep

Fear can have a huge impact on us. It has physiological, emotional, and even spiritual ramifications.

Fear is one of the basic motivational emotions for humans. It can override other less dominate emotions.

There are people who make most of their life decisions from a posture of fear. Even if you are not someone plagued by fear’s tentacles you know its power and grip. None of us are immune.

The week leading up to Jesus’ death saw many raw emotions come front and center. It is almost as if these emotions took turns gripping everyone during Holy Week. One of these emotions was fear.

At the last supper with Jesus’ announcement of betrayal.

In the garden when Jesus is praying.

At His arrest when the disciples flee.

It emerges again at the trial.

And then it takes up residency from the crucifixion onward. The disciples cower in fear and hide in their homes.

If we are not careful, we can read the resurrection accounts of Easter and assume fear is eliminated at the announcements by the angels, by Mary, and the others who saw the Risen Christ.

But truth be told, it took about 40 days of Jesus appearing again and again to convince the disciples and assuage their fears; it wasn’t until 10 days after that, Pentecost, that you see fear cast down.

I can't say whether Jesus’ first followers handled fear well. But I do think they handled it in a very human way. Like the disciples we have discovered that:

Fear is intensified by the unknown

Fear is intensified by focusing at what is right in front of you

Was Jesus attacked by fear during Holy Week? There was emotional vulnerability in the Garden of Gethsemane. But Jesus helps us learn a better way to handle fear; not just His example in the garden but also through His presence after the resurrection.

In the garden prayer He rested in His Father’s sovereignty, love, and awareness. Fear gave way to peace and resolve as He looked to the Father.

In appearing to His disciples after the resurrection Jesus showed them the power that God’s presence can have to calm and embolden them.

When Jesus was present after the resurrection, they were different people but once He went away again, they returned to a fear-based life.

Before the crucifixion, Jesus said, in John 14:25 - 27 *25 I am telling you these things now while I am still with you. 26 But when the Father sends the Advocate as my representative that is, the Holy Spirit He will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you. 27 “I am leaving you with a gift, peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So, don’t be troubled or afraid.*

“Fear not” (or its equivalent) is found in the Bible 170 times. And the first time we read it sets the stage for how God will resolve human fear throughout the rest of the Scriptures.

In Genesis 15: 1 *Sometime later, the LORD spoke to Abram in a vision and said to him, “Do not be afraid, Abram, for I will protect you, and your reward will be great.”*

There are many “enemies” that the Scriptures tell us not to fear but the solution is always: “I am with thee.”

There are many stimuli and many human responses to fear, but God’s presence can bring a corrective, conquering, and calming peace.

**2. Peace**

Continuing with John 20: 19 *Suddenly, Jesus was standing there among them! “Peace be with you,” He said.*

Such peace cannot always be explained. Paul talks about peace in Philippians 4: 7 *Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.*

In my work at the hospital, I learned quickly the potential that fear, and peace could have on a dying person and their family. I have seen families that were so consumed by fear that it produced psychological problems for some of them.

I have also seen entire families sitting peacefully beside the bed of a passing family member singing hymns of praise and thanking God for hope and grace and His divine presence.

I learned what the disciples most surely learned: there is a human way to handle fear and there is a Christian way. The difference is … Christ.

The first disciples learned this by watching and then experiencing Christ. What they discovered they recorded in the Gospels and other New Testament writings and their experiences help us to understand the power of presence and of knowing the living and loving God.

Between their insight and God’s presence we can see fear conquered in our lives as well.

Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you.’ This was the peace that He had promised in John 14: 27 *“I am leaving you with a gift, peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So, don’t be troubled or afraid"* and 16: 33 *"I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.”*

Jesus’ death had made it possible to receive this peace, because He had taken the punishment for everybody’s sins. He had made it possible for God to forgive everybody who believes in Jesus. Everybody who believes in Jesus can receive this peace.

Jesus said, **Peace be with you**: After their desertion of Jesus on the day of His crucifixion, the disciples probably expected words of rebuke or blame. Instead, Jesus brought a word of **peace**, reconciling **peace**.

In our Sunday lesson last week, we learned about the reconciling peace in Ephesians 2: 14 – 16 *14 For Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in His own body on the cross, He broke down the wall of hostility that separated us. 15 He did this by ending the system of law with its commandments and regulations. He made peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in Himself one new people from the two groups. 16 Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of His death on the cross, and our hostility toward each other was put to death.*

This gift of peace from Christ Jesus filled them with the joy of the Lord.

**3. Joy**

John 20: 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!*

Jesus himself explained that joy in John 16: 20 – 22 *20 I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn over what is going to happen to me, but the world will rejoice. You will grieve, but your grief will suddenly turn to wonderful joy. 21 It will be like a woman suffering the pains of labor. When her child is born, her anguish gives way to joy because she has brought a new baby into the world. 22 So you have sorrow now, but I will see you again; then you will rejoice, and no one can rob you of that joy.*

There is no other emotional experience that quite rivals joy in the Lord.

Can you remember a time when you were overwhelmed by joy? It defies explanation!

You meet the love of your life

The first time you hold your newborn child

You finally land the dream job you’ve have been working toward

You surrender your life to Jesus

The word joy is defined: Happiness over an unanticipated or present good. It carries overtones of gladness, exuberance, and celebration.

On the spiritual level it refers to the extreme

happiness with which the believer contemplates salvation and the excited anticipation of the afterlife.

I remember a recent occurrence that gave us all a time of fear when we heard about a car accident, followed by overwhelming joy at the report of no injuries to the driver or the unborn passenger, except for a small cut on the driver's pinky finger.

God has given us a great gift when He gave us the potential to experience joy - it’s the “dessert” in the diet of emotions we experience.

In Romans 14: 17 Paul describes God's Kingdom; *17 For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of what we eat or drink, but of living a life of goodness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*

The Gospels use the word joy a lot ... a whole lot! One of the most illustrative might be when Luke places three parables about finding things in the same chapter: the lost sheep (15:3-7); the lost coin (15:8-10); and the lost son ( 15:11-32 ). In each case the response to the discovery is joy! Great joy!

That is the shared emotional response that they all have in common after finding something ... or of being found.

Joy, in the sense we are looking at it today, arrives when God brings relief, rescue, resolution, resources, or redemption. All are reasons for joy, and all find their center in the love of God.

There is great joy for God when He finds that which was lost – and there is great joy for the one who is found too.

I remember very vividly losing track of our oldest son in a busy mall. I remember the fear; the sense of helplessness. I can still feel it when I think of that scene. I remember beginning to panic retracing my steps looking for Chris. And then – there he was in the back of the toy store luckily; he was taller than the average 4-year-old and dressed in bright colors. I was overjoyed and so grateful for answered prayer.

Have you ever heard it said that you don’t know what you have until you lose it? I think the disciples might “amen” that comment.

In Christ’s death they lost it all! They were cowering in homes and behind closed doors. They were thinking of returning to their old jobs and old ways of life and then – Jesus arrives. HE FOUND THEM!

Jesus arrives and they were overwhelmed with joy. I don’t think they ever again wanted to lose that relationship and Jesus made sure they didn’t – that’s why He sent the Holy Spirit to dwell within them and us.

There are things that happen, to you and me that bring a sense of deadness inside. It can be caused by so many things, but the general result is that we lose hope.

Today, your hope can be restored. You can sense the joy that the disciples felt when they met the living, resurrected Christ.

You can feel safe, loved, chosen, holy, and joy-filled as you fully surrender to the Living Christ Jesus.

You are called, not in spite of your weaknesses

but called with all that you are; God has a plan that only you can fulfill, and He’s glad you have come to join Him, in fact, He’s been waiting for you.

As we read the responsive reading on the screen, the alter is open for those who wish to make that commitment or re-commit to walk with Jesus, follow His plan, for His purpose, in His Kingdom.

**Responsive Reading**

“A Living Hope” from 1 Peter 1:3-5, 8-9

Leader: Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

**People: In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,**

Leader: And into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you

**People: You who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.**

Leader: Though you have not seen Him

**People: You love Him**

Leader: Even though you do not see Him now

**People: You believe in Him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy,**

Leader: You are receiving the goal of your faith,

**People: The salvation of your souls.**

**Amen**