

Peace in the Storm  
John 20: 19-23, Philippians 4:4-7

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The empty tomb was not enough to end the storm. The forces arrayed against Jesus would be arrayed against them too. So on Sunday evening, hours after Mary Magdalene had run to them and said, “I have seen the Lord!”, they were huddled in fear behind locked doors.

Fear can do us in. It can constrict our hearts; it can keep us up at night; it can fill our mornings with dread. It can cause us to act in ways we never would otherwise. I think fear is a bigger killer of the spirit that we ever realize.

It was fear that drove the disciples to go into the house and lock the doors. (Sometimes fear can even lock us up in rooms with *open* doors.) For the disciples, the world was suddenly out of control, and the words of Mary had not settled their hearts.

I

Then Easter happened to them. It was peace in the storm, the kind of peace we all need these uncertain days.

Jesus suddenly appeared to them in that room with locked doors. He needed no key. His resurrection body transcended space and time, not to mention those hand-built walls.

His first word to them was, “Peace to you”. Then he showed them his hands and side, the scars from the wounds of the nails and spear now healed. Maybe our own resurrection bodies will be like that, bearing the scars from our sufferings now healed.

The disciples were filled with joy as they now recognized him. Then he said to them a second time, “Peace be with you”, because we need to hear it over and over again. Many churches every Sunday have a moment called “the passing of the peace, when they turn to one another and share the peace of Christ, saying, “The peace of Christ”, sometimes with a hug or joined hands because we need the *touch* of peace too. Every Sunday. Because every Sunday we need it.

Then Jesus said, “As the Father has sent me, so send I you.” As I’ve said before, the word “apostle” means “someone who is sent.” So after he “apostled” Mary in the garden, the one the church has called, “Apostle to the Apostles,” he now “apostles” them to carry on his life in the world.

The famous 16<sup>th</sup> century nun, St. Teresa of Avila wrote:

Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good.

Yours are the hands with which he blesses all the world.

Yours are the hands, yours the feet.

Yours are his eyes, you are his body.

And the first job he sent them out to do was to forgive people's sins, literally to *loose them* from their sins.

It is so hard to receive forgiveness, to forgive ourselves. We need help, help from God, help from those who are Christ's hands and feet, his love-filled eyes.

Christ does not send us into the world to be the Judge Judy's of the world. The judge, the jury, the prison warden, but to be the one with the keys *loosing* us and opening the prison doors.

Jesus didn't leave them on their own to do the job. So, as the text says, he "breathed" on them his own breath and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." Before his death Jesus had said that he would send to them the Holy Spirit when he could no longer be with them bodily. The Holy Spirit he called Comforter, the *Paraclete*, which means literally to be "called alongside". We would not be left alone. God would come alongside, the Spirit would come alongside, the Living Christ would be alongside us.

It was now *Pentecost* happening to them in that room with locked doors, prefiguring the Pentecost that would happen fifty days later in the streets among Jerusalem to the larger body of believers.

And what is one of the fruits of the Spirit? Peace.

## II

Paul wrote about this peace from a prison cell. In prison! There in the midst of *his* storm!

“Rejoice in the Lord”, he said to the Philippians, “and again I say Rejoice.” “Let your gentleness be known to everyone, he wrote them, “The Lord is at hand.” The Lord is near. Near Paul, near them in their little church, near us.

And then he says the words which are themselves the gift of peace:

Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.

Perhaps our first requests today are about our fears, our anxiety, our worries—about ourselves, about those we love, about our nation. Then comes the blessing, the blessing of peace:

And the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds, stand guard over your hearts and your minds, in Christ Jesus.

The peace that passes all understanding. It is the peace deeper than the racing thoughts of our minds, deeper than those feelings that take over our hearts.

Anne Lamott says that sometimes our minds are like bad neighborhoods you don't want to enter alone. You are not alone. Christ goes there with you. Christ sits there beside you on the sidewalk, walks with you along the streets. And what he says is "Peace".

It is a peace deeper than understanding because our minds themselves cannot deliver us from our troubled minds and give the peace we need.

I pray this day that you may experience some measure of that peace. He is with us, you know, and he will bring peace. He will not desert us, no matter how great the storm. The storm will one day pass, and until it does, Christ gives us peace in the storm.

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