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John 20:19-23 – “Speaking Peace into Fear”

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John 20:19-23

¹⁹ On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

²¹ Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” ²² And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

The Word of the Lord. (**Thanks be to God**)

What is one of the last things you make sure to do in your house every night before going to bed?

Lock the door.

Front door? Check.

Back door? Check.

We lock the world out...

And lock ourselves in.

This morning we enter into this scene behind locked doors.

The disciples are meeting together...

But we know there’s a tension in the house.

Just a few days earlier their leader was executed—

Jesus was nailed up to a cross...

On display for all would-be rebels to see—

And these are his followers...meeting behind locked doors.

The Jewish authorities knew that certain people were following Jesus—

It was no secret—

So we can imagine that his followers felt eyes on them at all times now...

Like they were being watched.

The disciples were afraid...

They didn't want to be executed like their leader;

They didn't want to be kicked out of the synagogue; (cf. John 9:22)

They didn't want to be outcast from society.

They met behind locked doors out of fear.

Fear.

What scares *you*?

What are *you* afraid of?

(PAUSE TO LET PEOPLE ANSWER...Break-ins? Public speaking? Growing old?)

Chapman University put out a list of the top 10 fears that Americans had last year...

I know you're Canadian, but maybe you can relate.

(<https://ssrs.com/americas-top-fears-2018/>)

Our church has been in the process of renewal—

Going through the Church Renewal Lab—

And for the last year we've been listening: Above, Among, Outside, and Within.

When the Renewal Lab team got together to discuss everything we heard...

One thing that kept coming up was FEAR...

This uncomfortable emotion we get when we perceive something as a threat.

We found out that **people in our neighborhood fear Christians.**

There are certain stereotypes of Christians that our culture holds:

We beat people up with the Bible;

We condemn people to Hell;

We're judgmental;

We're preachy...

(I'd be afraid of that too!)

So our neighbors were surprised when we went door to door asking what we could do to improve the community.

They assumed we were there to push our agenda.

People fear us...

But we fear them too.

A lot of our neighbors are different from us.

They come from different countries...

Speak different languages...

Eat different foods and celebrate different festivals.

And we are afraid of those who are different from us.

Some of our neighbors are born and raised Canadian but have different life-styles.

Maybe they live out same-sex relationships;

Or maybe they hold different political views;

Or worship a different god.

They're different and so there's a fear there...

Often, we perceive something we're unfamiliar with as a threat.

Fear is also a barrier that comes up when we talk about sharing our faith...

We are afraid to share the good news of God's love in Jesus Christ.

We afraid that we're not good enough...

We're afraid that we won't know the answer to every question...

We're afraid how people will perceive us.

Maybe this is where we can best relate to the disciples.

"What will people think if they find out I follow Jesus?"

"Will they laugh?"

"Will they mock?"

"Will they still want to be my friend?"

I can definitely relate to this fear.

I want to be liked by everyone!

I have an unhealthy need for approval.

I experienced this the other day sitting in the barber's chair.

My barber...who I'm getting to know a little better...

Made a joke about women and the changing apparel with the changing weather.

What do I do?

Do I say something?

Will my barber act differently towards me when I tell him that I don't look at or joke about women in certain ways...

That "I feel called to live differently because of my faith."

I chose not to say anything...

I said to myself that now was not the time...

But it was probably fear driving that decision.

Fear also becomes a barrier to our discipleship (i.e. listening to and obeying Christ).

"If I get serious about this Jesus guy, what is that going to mean for me?"

"What am I going to have to give up?"

"What happens to my old life?"

In a lot of ways, we're like the disciples...

We've locked ourselves behind closed doors out of fear...

Sensing that someone or something is out to get us...

To take away our life, our freedoms, our security or our comforts.

But the resurrected Jesus steps into the midst of his gathered disciples...

And he says, "Peace be with you."

Jesus comes and proclaims peace.

There is nothing special about this statement on the surface—

It's the common greeting among Hebrews—

But Jesus' repeating it a second time begs us to pay attention:

“Peace be with you.”

“Shalom” is the word that would have been used by the Aramaic or Hebrew-speaking Jesus.

“Shalom” or “peace” was not just a greeting...

It was a word pregnant with all of the life God originally intended for his people:

Life that was complete, secure, whole, restored.

This is shalom...

This is what people would experience when God delivered his kingdom.

And this is what Jesus is now proclaiming to his disciples.

“Peace to you.”

“God’s shalom is now yours.”

In our passage, peace is connected to this idea of new life.

In v. 22—

After Jesus proclaims peace—

We read that he breathes on them.

Where else in the Bible do we read this language of breathing in/onto something?

“Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.” (Gen 2:7)

We’re given this thought that without the breath, this would just be a shell of a person.

Ezekiel 37:2-10

I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. ³ He asked me, “Son of man, can these bones live?”

I said, “Sovereign Lord, you alone know.”

⁴ Then he said to me, “Prophesy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! ⁵ This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life...’”

¹⁰ So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet... (Eze 37:2-10)

Again, breath bringing life.

The resurrected Christ—

With nail marks in his wrists where he was crucified...

And a piercing on his side where the spear was thrust—

He breathes on his disciples...

Saying “Receive the Holy Spirit”...

“Receive the new life that I’ve earned for you.”

See, God’s people were in need of new life.

They were in need of this “shalom.”

Ever since the Garden—

Where Adam and Eve turned away from God—

Humanity has been estranged from their Creator.

We separated ourselves from the source of all love, and life, and compassion, and joy.

We once lived in shalom with God...

But we traded that for chaos.

We traded that for fear...

For uncertainty—

This sense that we’re never complete...

That we always have to be achieving or doing something to feel good about ourselves.

We traded life from God for death.

When we turned away from God, we sinned against him...

And we continue to sin against him.

We can’t do anything to get that peace back.

Peace has to be given to us as a gift.

New life has to come to us from the outside...

It must be breathed into us.

And this is what Jesus did.

He died on the cross for the sins of his people...

So that we could have peace with God. (Rom 5:1)

Jesus proclaims peace and life to his disciples who are living in fear and in death.

This is the same peace and life that Jesus breathes into those who believe in him...

To us today.

This is what the whole book of John has been about...

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, coming into the world to live as one of us—

And to die as one of us—

So that we might have peace and life with God.

If you are looking for peace and new life today...

Look no further!

Everything we need is found in our restored relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

For those who do believe...

We're given a mission.

This passage is John's version of the Great Commission.

"As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

We are sent out in to the world to continue the work of revealing Jesus...

Who he is, and what he's done.

He is God the Son...

Who died for the forgiveness of our sin.

This is how we understand the last verse in our passage:

"If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven."

"If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

This is not saying that we have the ultimate authority to forgive sins...

That if *we* choose NOT to forgive someone...

Then neither will God.

No, the power to forgive sin rests with God alone.

And this is what he did in Jesus Christ.

We don't have power to forgive sins...

But we *do* have power to carry the message of forgiveness.

Christ achieved it...and now we're implementing it and making it known. (NT Wright)

We are carriers of the message of new life...

We carry the message of peace in a world filled with brokenness and fear.

But in order to do this, we have to come out from behind that locked door...

And step out into the world.

God gives us the Holy Spirit to empower us as we unlock the door, face our fears, and carry on the work.

Let's talk about a practical way to do this...

Many of our immediate neighbors are Arabic speaking...or they're Muslim...

Some are both.

I was talking to 2 boys the other day who came over from Aleppo in Syria.

They are English speaking, but their parents speak Arabic.

They're all new to this country.

Talk about living in fear...

Especially in today's political and social climate.

What's it like to live in a new country where you don't know the language or customs...

Where there is a growing anti-Muslim sentiment.

I bet they can relate to hiding behind locked doors out of fear.

But we are carriers of peace.

Just as Christ came and spoke words of peace to us...

We can do the same thing to them...literally.

We're going to learn the standard Arabic greeting:

"A salaam alaikum."

"Peace be with you."

Shaloam = Salaam

What are some ways you can be carriers of peace where God has placed you?

At work?

Around your neighbors?

What does it look like for you to unlock the door...?

To allow the Spirit to lead you from behind the closed door...

And carry the message of peace?

God has come to us to bring peace and life through Jesus Christ...

And now he is sending us to carry out that mission.

May you know the power of his Spirit as you go out to the world in peace.

Amen.