

John 20:19-23
The Power of Peace Be With You
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There are all sorts of things these days that offer up the promise of greater peace in our lives. One that intrigues me, which is pretty ingenious actually, is the doorbell camera. When the doorbell rings, no matter if you're in the house or half a world away, a video call is placed to your smart phone that allows you to see who's at the door.

The disciples, unfortunately, didn't have Ring.com. Who knows whether they would have opened the door to Jesus. But he didn't really need a door, did he?

On the evening of the first day, at the height of the excitement over the news that Jesus was risen, the disciples had a few hours to mull over this news. I wonder what was going through their minds between morning and evening. When big events happen, our minds and hearts swirl with emotions. We start coming up with scenarios of what this means now. If you haven't ever come face to face with that moment of decision of who is Jesus of Nazareth, and what does he mean to me, perhaps today is the day. Or maybe you've heard about him for a long time, but you've never gotten to know him and let him lead your life.

As a segue, I want to show a clip of a well-known public figure, who is asked point blank in an interview to give a response to who Jesus is in his life, and here's what he says:

[Video](#)

“Either Jesus is who he says he is or he is nothing more than a rock and roll, delirium, nutter.” And if you've ever wondered over that question, or perhaps wondered if it could all be true, you're not alone. In fact, by their actions, Jesus' own disciples were still in need of convincing. So I want to invite you to turn with me to John's gospel, either in your copy of Scripture or on the screens, John 20 verses 19-23. And as a sign of respect and honor for the authority of God's word, let's stand together as we hear the word of the Lord.

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”

There are times when life gets confusing, turned around, discombobulated, flipped upside down. And it's only natural for us to look for places of refuge, for calm waters, for the 'home' in homeostasis. This is what the disciples were looking for, their safe place. When news hit that Jesus was no longer in the tomb, the disciples went back to where they last gathered with Jesus. It was all they could do to cope.

It was Monday of this week, we all finally returned home to Wabash. Since the accident, my wife Amy and our two younger children, Annie and Conner, stayed with her parents in Fort Wayne. She did that not just because it was close to doctor offices and therapy appointments. “When I’m home,” she would say, “I don’t have to face a world that has changed. If I’m here, and safe, it’s like it didn’t happen.”

We’ve all locked the doors to the outside world, right? Here it’s safe, here I am protected in this sanctuary, here I don’t have to figure out what the new normal will be. We do this because, perhaps, deep down, there is still a little seed of worry that we will have to face it alone. That Jesus was really gone.

But do you see what John says? Jesus knew that their instinct would be to huddle and cuddle—an instinct churches today still know well—and he comes to them and says, **“Peace be with you.”** Instead of waiting for us to come to him, Jesus comes to us. Jesus knows that when things get sticky, when the waters begin to rock the boat, our instinct is to panic. When the disciples were in the boat together out on the Sea of Galilee and the storm began to rage, Jesus came to them—walking on the water—and said, **“Do not be afraid.”**

The first promise that we can hold on to when life rages is that *Jesus comes to us*. It may be in the form of a song, or the words of Scripture, or the thoughts of a friend or loved one. But when we’re locked away out of self-preservation, Jesus comes to us.

The second thing Jesus does is *gives his disciples proof that He has overcome*. **“He showed them his hands and his side.”** Later it would be Thomas, Jesus’ empiricist disciple, who says: “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and feet, and can touch it myself, I will not believe.” Too bad Thomas wasn’t there the first time Jesus shows up, because this is precisely what Jesus does. Even before they ask for it, Jesus show them the marks—the proof is in the pudding...hands in his side.

The disciples gathered in fear that the cross had won, that Caesar and the Jewish Authority would be coming for them next. They gathered fearful that their failure had let Jesus down once and for all. They didn’t remember Jesus’ words to them from John 2:19, **“Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.”** So when Jesus gives his disciples his crucified hands and wounded side, he is saying to them, “I want to give you the reason for the peace I am speaking,” a reason for peace that is deeper than a wish or words. Truth. *The crucified Jesus is, really, alive again.*

Lastly, *Jesus gives them his presence*, he breathes on them, giving his spirit, and tells them to forgive sins. Receive the Holy Spirit, and go about my mission of forgiveness.

Why does he do that? Why does Jesus call those who are afraid...to a ministry of forgiveness? It isn’t because we need to complete Jesus’ work for him. On the cross, Jesus paid it all, he forgave sins once and for all, he bridged the gap between a broken humanity and a holy God. If he did it all, why does he tell us to forgive, as well? So that we might experience the freedom of forgiveness ourselves.

When we lock ourselves away, we’re not keeping ourselves safe from the things that can hurt us, we’re just locking ourselves in those little rooms in our hearts—rooms called hurt, called despair, called resentment.

The word to convey forgiveness in the **New Testament Greek is *aphiemi* – it means to set free.** We think forgiveness is a heroic act because we are setting a person free who hurt us. But it is really our own freedom we are gaining. Forgiveness frees us from the power of the wounds we have experienced. It frees us to come back to life once again. In the words of the ethicist Lewis Smedes, “When you forgive, you set a prisoner free. And then you discover that the prisoner was you.”

Some hurts are great, and their wounds run very deep. How do we forgive even those who have wounded us deeply, and find freedom from a life of resentment? Here’s an even tougher question: How do you forgive someone who hasn’t asked for forgiveness or doesn’t acknowledge they’ve done anything wrong?

Before Jesus gave his disciples the ministry of forgiveness, he first showed them the scars from the cross that remained on his hands and side. Isn’t it striking that those wounds remained even after the resurrection? I believe that those scars from the wounds of Christ persevere to this day to remind us that his work of forgiveness does, as well.

You and I both know that forgiveness is not a one-time act – but often a daily choice to forgive. Forgiveness is a verb. It’s a choice. Each time we are tempted to crawl back into our rooms/tombs of despair and resentment, we must come back out, acknowledge the wounds in Christ’s hands and his side, and choose to forgive.

But man, oh man, we cannot do this work of forgiveness alone. And that is where Jesus helps us even more in this text. After showing the disciples the scars from the cross, the marks of grace held out to the world, Jesus then gave the disciples the Holy Spirit. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is to bind us into union with Christ. The Spirit allows your life to become so commingled with Christ’s life that as you draw closer and closer to your Savior, you will find that you are actively participating in Christ’s forgiveness as you choose to forgive.

In CS Lewis’ Narnia tale *The Silver Chair*, little Jill is only ten years old, but the fate of Narnia rests on her shoulders. You see the wicked queen of the underworld has abducted Prince Rilian. So this little English schoolgirl is given an impossible mission to rescue the Prince. Ah, but Aslan, the great Lion, takes Jill to the top of a high mountain and stands her next to the cliff and blows on her. And such is the power of Lion’s breath that it picks Jill up and blows her to Narnia. And when she arrives there, not only has she ridden on Lion’s breath, but she has Lion’s breath in her lungs. Man, when you have Lion’s breath in you, nothing can stop you. So Jill rescues Prince Rilian, and all is saved.

Now you might think that this is just a nice fairy tale, but oh no, this is actually CS Lewis’ allegory for the real life event of what we just read. Jesus sent his disciples into the world to perform miracles, to heal, to teach, and to cast out demons. Simply by telling this story, they were to go out and replace Christian Faith for paganism, as the basis of a whole new civilization. The ones he uses to do this are these 11 people. And yet that’s all it took for the gospel to literally change history.

Our histories can be rewritten by the decision to forgive. I know a wonderful story I’d like to tell to close out, but it’s not my story, it’s Amy’s, so I’m going to ask her to come forward and close out this morning’s message. Amy...

I have a friend named Martha. When she was very young, her father left the family, leaving Martha,

her brother and mother destitute and mourning. Martha's mother began to eat to deal her with emotional distress. Martha's mother eventually was diagnosed with diabetes and died when Martha was still a teenager. Martha's younger brother tried to commit suicide to cope with losing his mother. Martha spent all her mother's life insurance helping her brother recover from his suicide attempt and go to therapy, all while she was still a teen.

Incredibly, Martha rose above her family tragedies and went to law school. She found Jesus (or more like Jesus found her). She got a high-paying job in Chicago and met a man with an awesome family and they decided to marry.

The day before her wedding, Martha's father showed up in Chicago to walk her down the aisle. He had heard from a family member that Martha was doing well and getting married. Martha's friends (including me) could not believe this man who caused so much family tragedy and abandoned Martha was now here two decades later to reap all the reward.

Incredibly, Martha decided to allow her father to walk her down the aisle. She told me later of the incident: "Amy, if Jesus could forgive me, I can forgive my father. Besides, I want my own family to be different than the one I was born into."

There, on her wedding day, Martha stopped mourning the family she never had and began laying the foundation for her own family. She began to live out the verse above: "The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." As she walked down the aisle toward her new husband, Martha was showing all of us that day that her family would be different: it would be a family based upon Christ's forgiveness and compassion.

Ten years and two children later, Martha's own family is drastically different from the family Martha was born into.