

Peace Behind Locked Doors

I want to start this morning by saying that I am profoundly grateful for this morning's Gospel passage. It's been a real comfort to me this week to reflect on Jesus' words, "Peace be with you." Three times in this passage He repeats these words, "Peace be with you."

And I'll just say that these words have been a comfort because last week, which should have been aglow with the joy of Easter, was a sad week. You shouldn't have to have funerals for 22 year olds, or to watch the grief of parents and friends. I think I met Charles Stoney one time, very briefly in line after church. I didn't know him, but it was a sad week, nonetheless. Yet Jesus says, "Peace be with you."

So I want to talk about these words of the Risen Jesus, and the situation the disciples found themselves in when they heard them, and how we can take them home with us, today.

The passage tells us that it was evening on the first day of the week, it was Easter night. Now we often associate Easter night with bellies full of Easter dinner and children hopped up on chocolate and jelly beans, but the disciples found themselves in a good bit of anguish on that first Easter night. Just a week before, they had been with Jesus as he entered Jerusalem to shouts and praises. They thought Jesus was surely going to be King, and if He was king, then they would be in his royal court. Spirits were high! But then the unthinkable happened: their hero, their king, their friend, was executed as a common criminal, crucified at Calvary on trumped up charges. Now gone were their hopes that he was the Messiah, dashed were their dreams of being in His court, no longer would they share in his friendship. And that was all bad enough. But now Jesus' body was missing; Peter and John had seen the empty tomb themselves. And they knew who was going to get blamed for the theft. They were. His disciples. So the doors were locked, for fear of the Jews.

Fear, sadness, and lost expectation behind locked doors. That's not a good place to be. But I wonder how many of us can relate. Most of us have experienced the grief of a lost loved one, certainly we all have had to lay down hopes and expectations that would never be met. The fear in your lives is hopefully not fear of being captured by your religious leaders, as it was for the disciples, but often we experience the more subtle fear of exposure, of our skeletons being let out of the closet.

And what very often happens when we experience these emotions, is, at best, numbness, a life with little emotion; and at worst, anger, resentment, bitterness, and isolation, sometimes outwardly, but usually inwardly. We lock the doors of our lives and our hearts. We don't let anyone in because we don't want to experience that pain again. It can happen to anyone in a time of personal pain or tragedy. I've gone through it, you probably have too.

Heck, the disciples had spent three years with *Jesus Christ* night and day, and yet there they were on that first Easter night, the doors were locked, they were afraid, no one really knew what to do next. Huddled in hopelessness. And it was right then, in the midst of their grief and fear and confusion, that the Risen Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." They probably thought they were seeing Jesus' ghost. I mean the doors were locked! Talk about being afraid... But notice the order of what happens next. It says, "When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. *Then* the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord." Jesus graciously and patiently gave them the tools to believe, and *then* they were glad to see him.

But don't you think it's strange that nobody asks how He got in, how the doors were locked but he came and stood among them, without being a ghost? I would suggest that once He was there, Once they believed and had received His peace, they didn't care how He had gotten in, they were just glad He had. In fact the word for 'glad' there in the text is a word of celebration; they rejoiced!

So notice what has happened here. The disciples were afraid, and had locked themselves in. Jesus appears among them, offers them Peace, gives them the tools to believe, and then they rejoice. From fear to rejoicing, transformed hearts, in just a matter of seconds because Jesus appeared behind the locked door, offering His Peace.

Now, it's important to understand what exactly Jesus meant by the word 'Peace.' Throughout Scripture, this word can mean a few different things. It can mean a time without war, or it can mean personal tranquility, both of which are of course ways that we use the word Peace today. But the most common way it is used throughout Scripture, and what Jesus meant when he appeared to the disciples on that first Easter night, is that we are no longer at odds with God, but we are at Peace with Him. We are no longer separated from God by our sins; we're *done* with that separation. That's why Jesus said from the Cross, 'It is finished.' Because of *Jesus'* sacrificial death on the Cross, we're **no longer** at odds with God, as if it's us against Him, we are at peace with Him.

And so in the midst of the disciples' fear and worry and dashed expectation, Jesus comes, though the doors were locked, and stands among them, and with the **authority** of the Crucifixion and the **power** of the Resurrection, Jesus speaks right into their situation, right to their hearts, and says, "Peace be with you." Not, "you sorry jerks, why'd you leave me when the guards were taking me away?" Not, "Where's Peter, I'm gonna get him for denying me three times." But having DIED for their sins and RISEN for their eternal life, Jesus declares to all of them, "Peace be with you."

In the midst of sad and tragic events, when life isn't the way it is supposed to be, it's easy to get afraid, to forget the promises of God, to lock the doors and huddle up in hopelessness. To me the most important part of this passage is that the doors were locked, but Jesus came in anyway. There are times when he says, 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock' but this isn't one of those times. When our hearts are locked up, it may seem impossible to reach out to God. Jesus comes in anyway, and says 'Peace be with you.' And then He's patient with us. He's not condemning, or vengeful. And when we finally get to that point where we are able to really receive that Peace, that welcome intimacy with God, there's transformation: from fear to rejoicing. We may not know exactly how he got in this heart of ours, behind the locked doors, but we're sure glad he did.

On the night before he died, after the Last Supper, Jesus spoke these words to these same disciples, saying, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the **world gives** do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." And then he died. And their hearts were troubled and they were afraid. And then He rose again, and stood among them, and said "Peace be with you."

Friends, through the death and resurrection of Jesus, God is offering you this peace. Not as the world gives – this is not a hope of uninterrupted tranquility, nor a promise of life without conflict. But it is open access to God, a promise of His companionship and compassion and comfort, of His transforming grace, and of eternal life.

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."

Remember this when you pass the peace today. Remember this when you take communion, when you go home with your families, and when things happen in life that aren't supposed to happen.

Remember that Jesus is risen, and that he stands among us saying, "Peace be with you."
Amen.