

SER21-13 "The Words Jesus Says – The Words We Need to Hear More Than Ever: "Peace Be with You" John 20:19-31 & 1 John 1:1 – 2:3

To begin this morning, I don't have to remind us that we're living in scary times...indeed, gathering as church this morning here in-person, following rules of social distancing and masks. And some still at home participating via FB Live streaming (or in your home reading this sermon) is a necessary outcome of these times. Given the circumstances of our lives right now, especially if you listen to the news at all, you'd most likely prefer to be inspired, uplifted, encouraged, emboldened than hearing more about the things that scare us.

- ▶ some folks turn off the tv or quit reading the newspapers, except maybe the comics...and there's not much "peace be with you" in the comics.

- ▶ Some people throw off the traces of lockdown and travel to the beach, to big family parties, ext..

- ▶ some go deeper into their lockdown...

The disciples in our post-resurrection story this morning are locked down in self-quarantine, worried, afraid: this whole experience of following Jesus has come to a messy ending, it seems. I guess they didn't get the e-mail that reminded them that "***the whole point of Easter is that with God what seems like a terrible ending is actually the opening up of whole new possibilities...a new beginning.***" the point of my Easter Sunday sermon? I said, resurrection calls us to living lives FULLY. ABUNDANTLY. Right now, in the here and now...not someday when die and to heaven.

In these 21st Century 'Coronavirus-times' let me say it another way: even in the face of all that frightens us, in all that brings death, and loss and harm, we CAN LIVE IN LOVE AND GRATITUDE AS WE GIVE WITNESS TO OUR FAITH. As we [promote getting the vaccines and encouraging others to do the same....Please, in giving witness to your getting the vaccine you help build the table bigger and bigger and better and better.

Just imagine, from your ancestors (many in the graves across from Trinity Church) we want to bring their gifts that bind us to each other and to

the work of Jesus around us....and let us, just possibly let us be the dream and hope of Jesus in this place in this time and in the days to come---while discovering new ways to keep faith with those ancestors and to keep integrity with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Drawing on Steve Greens song, "Find Us Faithful," you will grow into the peace Jesus offers us in these days of 2021.

As I said in my Easter sermon, resurrection is for the living...FOR LIVING FULLY in the here and now. As Maya Angelou's poem -I will Rise - (which I have shared with you in the past) reminds us of our own stories of resurrection ("the rising up of many people that had been given up for dead"). The core of Easter is not just Jesus' resurrection, it is also, and maybe most importantly, the promise of our own resurrections. Michael Piazza, president of Hope for Peace and Justice says, **"If resurrection is only a future promise to be cashed in after we die, then it has little impact on our daily living. If we are convinced, however, that life is stronger than death, just like light disperses darkness, then it is that conviction that should guide our days."** Believe it, my friends, "life is stronger than death."

Thomas in our gospel text today in the 20th chapter of John is struggling with this truth that life is stronger than death. While we almost always describe the disciple Thomas as the "doubting Thomas," what if we think of his quest in this story as being more about "just wanting to SEE what the others had seen" rather than doubting Jesus was alive? He just wanted to see what they had seen. Mostly, with the exception of Mary Magdalene and a couple other women, depending on which gospel you read, the disciples had seen very little. No one saw the resurrection. Mary sees an empty tomb. She mistakes Jesus for the gardener.

In this story of Jesus coming into the room (2 times) like any other story has a past, a present and a future. Where we focus our minds and hearts is crucial to how we live now in the present and how we might imagine our living in the future.

The gospel story of Jesus' resurrection has a past, a present and a future: ► Past: Jesus told the disciples and the Pharisees many times that he would be attacked and ridiculed and beaten down and then raised up; ► Present: Jesus stood up for God and stood up to the religious leaders threatened by his radical love gospel and they killed him; ► Future: As the risen Christ, his being raised from death to new life gives us a living Christ – hopefully with more power and passion than even before. In the new present, Jesus blesses (with ***"peace be with you"*** in the room) the disciples which "laid the groundwork for what was to come next. Jesus commissions them to carry on this work in the world in his name and empowers them with the holy spirit through his inspiriting breath and command: "As God (as the father) has sent me so I send you..." well, my friends, Jesus is still sending us. Where? How? For what purposes? When? Why? -- "To continue to be apostles and collaborators with Christ in furthering the kingdom of God."

Let me also say that we didn't see the resurrection either. Indeed, we have never seen the physical Jesus. But Easter is not over. In the recurring Easter celebrations, we see the living Christ. Jesus comes to us thru the closed doors of our lives and hearts and offers a blessing: "peace be with you. And then he sends us forth: to discover that, indeed, **the whole point of Easter is NOT about a terrible ending but about the opening up of whole new possibilities.**

And let us try and remember that Jesus was the one they crucified; and Christ was the one God raised to new life...fully alive. For me the challenge now is what am I to do to give witness to this fully alive Christ...raised up out of the tomb by a loving God.?

May this be the way it happens in your lives and mine. Amen