

The Word Became Flesh
Week 62
John 20:18-23 (CSB)
“The Unexpected Guest”

Introduction

Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen The LORD!”
And she told them what He had said to her. **John 20:18**

Have you ever been in the know on something spectacular, only to find that no one believes you when you share the story? It's a pretty miserable feeling isn't it? I know, because preachers experience it all the time. We share the greatest truth in the history of the universe, namely the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, and yet, many look at us like we are a mental patient out of the asylum on a weekend furlough! I image that it was much the same for all the women who first witnessed the resurrected Christ. They rushed off to tell their husbands and the disciples, but virtually no one believed their message.

In fact, I am completely convinced that the two disciples that Jesus met up with on the road to Emmaus were a husband and wife on their way home that Sunday. Just listen to Luke's description of them:

Now that same day two of them were on their way to a village called Emmaus, which was about seven miles from Jerusalem. Together they were discussing everything that had taken place. And while they were discussing and ARGUING, Jesus Himself came near and began to walk along with them. **Luke 24: 13-15** (emphasis added)

Now, The Scriptures make it clear that none of the male disciples believed the woman's story concerning the resurrected Christ (**Luke 24:10-11**). So, if these disciples were just two men on the way to Emmaus and they were discussing the events of the day, what would they have to argue about? But what if it was one of the women who had visited the tomb, walking home with her unbelieving husband? Now that makes a lot more sense to me. Those two would have definitely had something to argue about! And for the record, some of the earliest artistic renditions of this story depict them as husband and wife, so I'm not alone in this theory!

Now, let's look at Mary Magdalene. She ran back to where all the disciples were hiding out and told them everything that Jesus had said. And guess what? No one believed her either. I love how Jesus revealed Himself first to these women of faith, before He made His first appearance to the disciples. Could the reason be that while the disciples had abandoned Him and hidden out in fear, that these women had boldly made their love for Him known to the entire world? I am convinced that this is the case. However, I am also heartened by the fact that Jesus did not quit on any of those that He had chosen, even though they had temporarily quit on Him.

I can only imagine the atmosphere in the room where the disciples had gathered to commiserate and hide out from their imaginary pursuers. They were terrified that the Jewish leaders might also incite the Romans against them for being followers of Jesus. But their fears were completely unfounded. Rome had not been all that concerned about Jesus in the first place. Pilate only had Him executed to make the Sanhedrin go away. He wasn't about to waste any precious time chasing down a bunch of fishermen and the like. Isn't it amazing that ninety percent of the things that we worry about in this life never actually happen?! Maybe we should try to walk by faith instead. God, after all, is and has always been sovereign.

So, let us look together at this story of God's love in the midst of failure. The disciples had run away. Their faith was weak indeed, and yet, The Savior came looking for them. And rather than giving them a stern rebuke, He encouraged them. In the midst of all their fear and doubt, He offered them *Peace, Purpose, and Power*. And He will do the same for us as well. Please allow me to explain.

Peace (vs.19-20)

When it was evening on that first day of the week, the disciples were gathered together with the doors locked because they feared the Jews. Jesus came, stood among them, and said to them, "Peace be with you." Having said this, He showed them his hands and his side. So the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

John 20:19-20

We do not know where the disciples gathered that night in Jerusalem. Perhaps it was in the same upper room that they had shared the Passover meal just a few days prior. Why they had gathered together in one place, while at the same time being concerned about being arrested, is rather inexplicable. It would seem that the obvious course of action would be to scatter, if they were concerned of being taken into custody by the government. The only explanation for their gathering that makes any sense whatsoever is that they wanted to discuss what the women from the empty tomb had been telling them.

It is also important to understand from reading the different gospel narratives that it wasn't just the original disciples that were gathered together. Judas, of course, was not there and neither was Thomas. But according to the Scriptures, there were other followers of Jesus in the room that night, including the two who had been arguing on the road to Emmaus. They had rushed back to find the disciples to share with them that they too had seen the risen Savior (**Luke 24:33-35**).

Now, imagine the chaos in the room. Some claiming to have seen the risen Christ, while others still did not believe. Thomas, I believe, had actually been there, but left the meeting early. This is why Luke tells us that the "eleven" were there at first. Thomas made a declaration that he would not believe it until he saw Jesus with his own eyes (which sounds about right for Thomas). John tells us that Thomas was not there when Jesus came (**John 20:24**). This is what leads me to believe that he was there at first, but left early; perhaps in fear that at any moment either Roman soldiers or temple guards would be breaking down the locked door.

Needless to say, there would have been a great deal of serious discussions going around the room, when Jesus simply appeared out of nowhere and stood in their midst. "Had Thomas left the door open when he left?" some must have wondered. How did this stranger get in here? And when they recognized it was Jesus, they must have thought they were seeing a ghost! That would explain how He got in through the locked door. The room must have been a mix of terror and curiosity, when Jesus calmed their fears by saying "*Shalom*" peace. It was a common Jewish greeting, but thanks to the events of the previous week, it has come to mean so much more than ever.

For you see, thanks to the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, we are now able to have two levels of peace. We can, through Christ, have peace *with* God as well as the peace *of* God. And this is what Jesus came to bring to the disciples on that first resurrection Sunday evening. First and foremost, He offered them, as He offers us, peace with God. His atoning death on the cross serves as a propitiation for our sins. Which simply means, the wrath of God was satisfied upon the cross. Our debt has been paid. And any, who will place their faith in Jesus, will be forgiven of their sin. We, who are in Christ, are now at peace with God.

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our LORD Jesus Christ.

Romans 5:1

And because we have this peace with God, our souls can find rest in the peace of God. We no longer have anything to dread, for we know that in Christ Jesus we have a peace that passes all understanding, knowing without a shadow of doubt that we are secure in Him.

Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your request to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:6-7

Jesus died and rose again to secure for us this wondrous and unending peace!

Purpose (vs. 21)

Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, I also send you." **John 20:21**

So many in our churches today actually believe that it is only required of the clergy to spread the gospel. Nothing could be further from the truth! Jesus commissions **all** of His followers to be His witnesses. Remember that it was not only His specially chosen eleven disciples (Thomas wasn't even in the room), but rather, there were several there who claimed to be His followers. And He gave this message to them all! He has commanded every believer to go into the world and share the good news of His gospel to all who will listen. This is the PURPOSE of the Church!

I would like to remind each of you that no matter your status in this life, no matter where you come from or where you are going, if you are a believer, you have been given by God a mission field in which to work. As God sent His Son into the world to bring salvation, He is now sending us to carry on the mission. We, the Church, are the body of Christ, and we are to go about doing as He did. There are no exemptions from this service. If you are a Believer, then you also must be a witness. And quite frankly, there are those in your mission field that no one is better qualified to reach than *you!* So do not leave the work that was intended for you to someone else. To love Christ is to preach Christ.

Now, I know what some will say, "I can't preach Jesus. I'm not called to preach." Well let me remind you of some pretty poignant verses of Scripture that will change your mind.

Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship.
Romans 12:1

The word that Paul uses in this verse that is translated as "worship" is "latreia" in the Greek. And it actually means a service of ministry. It was a word that was used to describe the service offered to God by the priests. So what does this verse mean? It means that we are **all** called to offer ourselves up fully to God, to serve Him as His priests in this world. Still not convinced? Still a doubting Thomas? Well, listen to what Simon Peter, one of the guys who was in the room that night, has to say about the matter:

As you come to Him, a living stone—rejected by people but chosen and honored by God—you yourselves, as living stones, a spiritual house, are being built to be a holy PRIESTHOOD to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.
1 Peter 2:4-5 (emphasis added)

This is the doctrine commonly know as "the priesthood of the believer". 'Ol Pete wasn't talking to a bunch of ordained preachers when he said that, he was speaking to Christians. If you are a believer in Jesus, then you have been called to be a priest of Jesus. And it is in this capacity, that He is sending us all out to serve Him as ministers of the gospel. So if you believe that witnessing is only intended for members of the so-called "clergy", just remember that you **are** a member of the clergy! And Christ has given you a purpose; to go out into your assigned mission field as His priest.

And here is the good news, you will not be going out there alone and unequipped. In our own strength, we would be abject failures in our endeavors to be priests of The Everlasting, Almighty God. We simply cannot make these spiritual things happen in our own flesh. Which brings us to the final thing that Christ brought to those disciples that miraculous evening!

Power (vs. 22-23)

After saying this, He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." **John 20:22-23**

The work of the Church, the body of Christ, its very purpose here on earth, is to go out and make disciples. Christ, the head of His body, must also empower that body in order to enable us to fulfill that purpose. So He gives us His Spirit. The Holy Spirit is our power source. No true Believer can say that he/she does not have the power or potential to be an effective witness. For everyone who believes in Christ is filled with the Spirit of Christ.

Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the flesh, but in The Spirit, if indeed The Spirit of God lives IN YOU. If anyone does not have The Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. Now if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but The Spirit gives life because of righteousness. And if The Spirit of Him Who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you, then He Who raised Christ from the dead will also bring your mortal bodies to life through His Spirit Who lives in you. ***Romans 8:8-11*** (emphasis added)

That resurrection Sunday, Jesus breathed on His disciples (all of them) and commanded that they receive The Holy Spirit. This event would actually occur a few weeks later at Pentecost (***Acts 2***). It is interesting to note that Jesus “breathed” upon His followers that evening. The word, both in Hebrew and in Greek, for Spirit means “wind” or “breath”. Just as God breathed life into Adam at creation, Jesus breathed the life of The Spirit into His followers at the onset of the “New Creation”. When Jesus finished His work of redemption with His death upon the cross and certified it with His rising from the dead, a new work of creation was established. This is the reason that His Church began to worship on the first day of the week (namely Sunday), for it was the day when the new creation was first inaugurated.

Another topic that must be addressed in this passage was Jesus’ words regarding forgiveness. Many have mistaken this statement from Jesus to mean that He gives His followers, or at least some of them (ie. Priests, and Popes in Catholicism), the power to absolve people of sin. But *The Bible* is crystal clear that only God can forgive sin. So what did Jesus mean when He said this? He is telling all Christians that since they are indwelt by The Spirit, they now have the authority to proclaim the truth of the gospel message. We have the authority of God’s Word to share with the world that if they repent of their sin and follow Jesus, then they will be forgiven. As ambassadors of Christ, every Believer has been empowered by The Spirit to share the message of forgiveness. Those who accept it will be forgiven, while those who reject it will remain in their sins. Once more, it is only by The Spirit that we are empowered to carry on the mission of Christ.

So let’s make sure that we understand all of the realities that apply to each and every disciple of Christ from this first Resurrection Sunday. Jesus, through His death, burial, and resurrection, offers to us the same things that He gave those disciples cowering in fear that night in the upper room. He gives us His Peace; the peace *with* God and the peace *of* God. He gives us our Purpose; the Great commission of The Church to go out as His witnesses to preach the gospel to a lost and dying world. For the gospel is the means by which all sin is forgiven. And finally He gives us the Power of The Holy Spirit the very moment that we believe, to enable us to do His will, to obey His commands, and complete the mission that He has given us. The same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead, now ***lives in us!***

The resurrection has brought us all that we require in order to serve Christ. We not only have everlasting life in heaven, but an abundant life filled with meaning and purpose here on earth. Everything that Jesus gave to His followers that night is available to every Believer as well. And that is why we will overcome all of the trials and tribulations of this life, for we are more than conquerors in Him. Or as the hymn-writer has so eloquently described.

*Because He lives, I can face tomorrow.
Because He lives, all fear is gone.
Because I know, He holds the future
And life is worth the living,
Just because He lives!*

(Because He Lives. By Bill Gaither copyright 1971)

And let those in Christ, who have the peace of God, the purpose of God, and are empowered by The Spirit of God, all say... **TRUTH!!**