

Resurrection Revisits
What Difference Does it Make?
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Two weeks ago we visited with Mary Magdalene outside the tomb on the day of Jesus' resurrection from John 20:11-18. We read about her astonishment to see Jesus standing before her, and we pondered his instructions to her, "*Do not hold onto me for I have not yet ascended to the Father.*" One of the conclusions I drew regarding those words was that Jesus was telling her to let go of the Jesus she thought she knew and understood before his crucifixion and resurrection, and open her mind (and ours) to the reality of his full identity: A resurrected Savior, a King of a Kingdom that is already here among us, but not yet fully here.

Today we are staying with the day of Christ's resurrection in John 20, but now instead of morning, it is the evening. Let's listen to the Scripture again that we read as part of our call to worship from John 20:19-24, "*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!'*"¹⁹ *After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.* ²⁰ *Again Jesus said, 'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.'* ²¹ *And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.'*"

Let's pray together: *Thank you, Heavenly Father, Jesus our Redeemer, and Holy Spirit our Teacher, thank you for loving us and claiming us and calling us to be your own. Thank you for your attention and activity in our lives. Thank you for the promises you give in your Word. Help us to give your Word the attention it deserves now so that we may become more like Jesus. This we pray in His name, Amen.*

The question in the sermon title is this one, "What Difference Does It Make?" What difference does it make that Jesus was crucified, died, was buried, and on the third day was raised from the dead? What difference does it make in our lives, in the life of our church, and in the world that Jesus is a resurrected Savior?

Our text for today shows us the difference his resurrection began to make in the lives of his disciples. Surely they were terrified. They were hiding behind not just closed doors, but locked doors! Most likely they were afraid because they thought they might be killed next. They saw what Jesus went through – and they didn't want to suffer that way themselves. Who would? Jesus himself asked his Father if there was another way! And then Jesus comes and stands among them. Many people really want to know the "how" of this. How did Jesus all of a sudden come and stand among his disciples in a room with a locked door? Obviously, he didn't knock or ring the bell. He simply was there. This was the way it was for him after his resurrection. He appeared where he needed to appear, door or no door, lock or no lock! But if we get stuck on the 'how,' we are going to miss the most important reality: After they had seen him brutally tortured and crucified to death, *Jesus came and stood in the midst of them!* This one they had followed, for whom they had left family and friends and jobs behind, whom they had given their lives to be with, back from the grave, standing there among them saying, "*Peace be with you.*" And he showed them his hands and his side in case they were still doubting. And then he said it again, "*Peace be with you?*"

The first "*peace be with you,*" comes to their ears in the midst of shock, fear, doubt, and confusion. It wasn't just a greeting like, "hey, how's it going!" This first peace message is coming from the one who is the Prince of Peace! Jesus is actually giving what he told them on the night before his crucifixion (John 14:27), "*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not let them be afraid.*" This is the peace that Jesus speaks into the room on the night of his resurrection with his beloved disciples. "*Peace*

be with you!" "It's okay. Take a deep breath. I am here. I am here." He is conferring peace to their troubled minds and hearts.

Then he shows them his wounds and repeats it again, "*Peace be with you.*" This time, it is not merely to calm or fortify in the midst of confusion. We can tell by what comes next in the text, that this second spoken peace message is a commissioning word. The disciples were now given a commission to be not just the *possessors* of his peace, but *dispensers* of the kind of peace the world cannot give. You have to have something before you can give it away. First you have to possess peace before you can dispense it to others. "*Peace be with you,*" he said. Now the commissioning: "*As the Father has sent me, now I am sending you. And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." "If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."*

I'd like to say that after this, the disciples were completely changed men. All their fear was gone, they were bold and courageous, and they busted out of that room ready to tell the world about the Risen Savior! But that's not what happened. It took a little longer for them to get to that point. They did get there – but not that fast! We know because in v. 26 we read that a week later they were back in the house with the doors locked when Jesus came to them again saying, "*Peace be with you.*"

Sometimes the peace that Jesus alone gives comes and settles on us like a warm blanket. Sometimes it takes a while because of the burdens we are carrying, because of the difficulty we have laying those burdens down, because of the things that have happened in the past, because of the things we fear about the future. It takes a while to trust that Jesus isn't just the friend of sinners and the healer of our hurts, but he is truly the resurrected Savior of our souls whose presence through the Holy Spirit within us brings us a peace that defies the circumstances that swirl around us. His peace takes us from a place of a frantic "what if this happens, what if that happens..." to a place of confidence in "what IS...". What is my reality right now? Jesus, the resurrected Savior is here. Is with me. Is with you. Is within me. Is within you. As God breathed life into Adam, Jesus breathes life into us by giving us his Holy Spirit, giving us his peace, and making us bold and courageous for Him.

Why else would we have the confidence to give every penny of the Easter Sunday offering away for the last two years, plus give away an additional tithe on the funds we spent on ourselves creating a new classroom with an upgraded electrical system? I mean, we have expenses here, right? Two full time staff members and 4 part-time staff members, the repair and maintenance on this aging property, the expenses that go along with a vital discipleship focus, office expenses, etc, which last year included \$7300 in electric bills, \$12,400 in fuel oil, \$6700 in small group materials.... To give away \$11,305 plus \$1,773 to Pregnancy Ministries plus donating hygiene items for clients at OSI (Occupational Services) – why would we do such outrageous (and some might say reckless) things?

Fred & Lydia Holcomb are living in Bolivar, MO right now while Fred is being trained in missionary aviation. They are answering God's call to become missionaries with Samaritan Aviation in Papua New Guinea, sharing Jesus through emergency life-flights, medicine delivery, hospital ministry and community health and outreach programs among the 400,000 people living in the remote jungles of the East Sepik Province. We support this family with \$100 per month. At the time I contacted Lydia to tell her about the special Easter gift of \$1256 we would be sending, Fred was taking an intensive class to finish up his flight instructor certification. This particular course and exams cost over \$4,000! The gift we are sending will help to cover this additional expense that we, of course, knew nothing about. But God knew.

Another missionary we support at \$200 per month told me that the gift we sent will be used to purchase a much-needed special large format printer with refillable ink tanks for the country of Malta! The very morning I emailed our missionary telling of the special Easter gift was the very morning the desperate need was made known for the printer to print Bible lesson materials. We, of course, knew nothing about this need. But God knew.

Allow me to read what came from Shirley Ocasio in Lithuania (whom we support at \$150 per month). *“About the Easter offering... God’s timing always amazes me! If you remember our campaign last year at this time was to get us to the point where we could stay here until it was time to come home this June. As God does, that has worked out perfectly. But....we don’t want to go home! We are really seeing things come together and are planning (the new church) launch for October 2019....we don’t want to miss that and believe our team needs us here. So, we are praying to come home for the summer only - and raise enough support to carry us another year until we would come home for furlough 2020-2021. God’s timing is perfect and we love that we are partners together with you all!”* We didn’t know the need, but God did.

Bryan and Emily Gerlach in Thailand (whom we support at \$100 per month) wrote (from Emily), *“That is WONDERFUL news about the Easter offering. Praise God, that is such a huge blessing! We were praying about some expenses coming up with furlough and I told Bryan I had a peace that God would provide. I am truly blessed to see His provision through you! Thank you!”* Again, we didn’t know the need, but God did.

Rebekah Mancilla said that the extra funds will help them purchase Bibles and prizes for the children in the Bible clubs they are starting in Argentina!

What difference does it make that we worship and serve a Risen Lord? He gives us confidence! He gives us peace! He causes us to step out and do things the world would call reckless and maybe even irresponsible. Why? Because of the peace he gives us – the peace we call our own and the peace to share with others the truth that though we sin, he forgives us. Though others sin against us, we forgive them. This peace that Jesus gives is like super glue – it holds us together when things around us seem to be falling apart. This peace is like a giant magnet that draws us closer to God and closer to our brothers and sisters who share it. That’s why we long to be here together on a Sunday morning – because here we experience a taste of the Kingdom that is already here but not yet fully here – and that strengthens and encourages us to take this Kingdom peace out into a world desperately in need of peace.

I want to conclude this morning by telling you a story shared in our ministerium meeting this past week. It comes from a publication called barnabasaid – a relief agency for the persecuted church – bringing hope to suffering Christians (www.barnabasaid.org). All over the world Christians are being persecuted. Here in our own country we see persecution of Christians and of Jews ramping up, don’t we? The truth is, the Church has always been persecuted and will continue to be persecuted until Jesus comes again. But in some places, those who proclaim Christ are dying at the hands of those who hate the name of Jesus.

“There was a group of about 500 Christians in Nigeria who had come from a Muslim background. They had gathered together in unusually large numbers after suffering attacks by Boko Haram Islamist militants. But then they were attacked again. The majority managed to get away, but 76 were captured and taken to a Boko Haram camp where they were tortured. The four male leaders of the captured believers were asked by Boko Haram to renounce their Christian faith and return to Islam, or they would be shot. The four refused and were shot in front of their families and friends.

A week later the four widows of the dead men were asked to renounce their faith and return to Islam, or their children would be shot. They were given time to think over this dreadful choice, but, while they were agonizing together that evening, the children came running into the room, excitedly telling their mothers that Jesus had appeared to them and had told them all would be well.

Jesus then appeared to the whole group of 72, and told them not to fear for He would protect them. He said they should not renounce Him but should stay strong, and that He was the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

The next day the Boko Haram militants lined the children up against the wall and asked the four mothers whether they would deny Jesus and return to Islam. All said, “No.” The soldiers prepared their weapons to take aim at the children, but suddenly began clawing at their own heads and screaming, “Snakes! Snakes!” They ran from the scene, some of them falling to the ground dead.

One of the Christian men reached for the gun of a dead militant but a little girl, at four years old the youngest of the children, put her hand on his arm to stop him. "You don't need to do that," she said. "Can't you see the men in white fighting for us?"

Some have asked whether such a wonderful story can be true. It is a good question. We all know that God can do such miracles, as for example when He covered a mountainside with horses and chariots of fire to save Elisha from the king of Aram (2 Kings 6:17). But not every claim made about the persecuted Church in the twenty-first century is accurate.

Therefore, the local Christians in Nigeria set up a Discernment Committee to look into the story told by the 72 survivors. One of the actions of the Discernment Committee was to create a book of 26 different pictures of Jesus. The book was shown individually to each of the 72 men, women, and children, who were asked to choose the image that most resembled the man who had appeared to them that night. All 72 picked the same one."

What difference does it make that Jesus was crucified, died, was buried, and on the third day was raised from the dead? What difference does it make in our lives and then in the world that Jesus is a resurrected Savior? He gives us a peace the world cannot give. He gives us courage to be recklessly passionate to share what he has given to us with anyone and everyone, here, there, and everywhere, including supporting 47 kids through Compassion International all over the world! I spent time with John and Joan Stewart on Thursday and they told me that after more than a dozen years of supporting Akatwijuka Anaah (who is now 22 years old) in Uganda, she graduated from high school, from the university, from the Compassion project, and is now an English teacher in her country. As a result of God's work in her life, including John & Joan's sponsorship, Akatwijuka's entire family came to faith in Jesus Christ! Our resurrected Savior gives us life, new life, that takes all the stuff of our past that the world says we need to keep locked away, and brings it out into the light to be used to help others find peace with Christ, receive God's forgiveness, and in turn forgive others by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

So, how are you feeling, church? Are you ready to press on? Are you ready to keep growing in maturity as his disciples, taking whatever comes, and bringing the mind of Christ into whatever comes? Are you ready as ambassadors from the embassy of the Kingdom of God, are you ready to keep and dispense His peace to the kingdoms of this world? Do not be afraid. The Risen Christ is among us, and for those who believe, that makes all the difference in this life and in the life to come. Thanks be to God! Amen!!