

WHEN JESUS SHOWS UP | FEAR BECOMES PEACE

John 20:19–23

Big Idea | Jesus transforms fearful survivors into peace-filled witnesses.

Thesis throughline: Fear turned the disciples into survivors. Jesus turned survivors into witnesses.

BEHIND LOCKED DOORS

The doors are locked. The curtains are drawn. The room is dim.

Footsteps echo in the street below.

Voices in the distance.

A knock somewhere nearby makes heads turn.

Fearful whispers spread quickly through the room.

Nobody is sleeping.

Three days earlier they watched Jesus publicly executed.

Now rumors are spreading that He's alive.

Some women claimed they saw Him.

Peter and John found an empty tomb.

But nobody knows what comes next.

I can imagine the questions flowing through the disciples' minds:

- "What if they come for us?"
- "What if this movement is over?"
- "What if we wasted three years?"
- "What if we were wrong?"

Peter is in the room. The man who swore he would never deny Jesus.

John is there. Thomas too.

Some are grieving. Some are ashamed. Some are angry. Some are numb.

But everyone is afraid. Fear has a way of shrinking people. The movement appears over. Then resurrection enters the room.

19 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!" 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

21 Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." 22 And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

Fear had reduced disciples into survivors.

1 | FEAR MAKES LIFE SMALLER (v.19)

Fear doesn't just make people cautious. It makes life smaller. Fear doesn't just make people cautious. It makes life smaller. The disciples used to move through villages with Jesus. They were not timid men living safe, predictable lives. They crossed storms on the Sea of Galilee while waves crashed over the boat and thought they might die. They walked into regions people avoided and watched Jesus confront demons no one else could control. They stood in front of crowds of thousands with almost no food in their hands and somehow trusted Jesus enough to start passing out bread anyway.

They left careers behind. Left fishing nets on the shore. Left tax booths and familiar routines. They walked into villages where they were rejected. They preached publicly. Prayed for the sick. Cast out demons in Jesus' name. They followed Him into conflict with religious leaders and Roman pressure. More than once, they watched angry crowds become dangerous crowds, and still they stayed near Him.

Peter once stepped out of a boat onto open water because Jesus said, "Come." John stood close enough to the cross to watch Jesus die. Thomas was willing to follow Jesus even when he thought it might cost them their lives. These were not passive spectators to the ministry of Jesus. These were men who had seen impossible things happen right in front of them.

But now the room is closed. Fear has reduced their world to a locked room.

And that's what fear does. It narrows your imagination until survival becomes your only goal. You stop asking, "*What is God calling me to do?*" and start asking, "*What can I do to play life safe?*"

Fear closes doors.

- It closes the door on obedience because obedience feels dangerous.

- It closes the door on relationships because obedience feels risky.
- It closes the door on calling because failure feels unbearable.
- It closes the door on witness because people's opinions suddenly feel bigger than God's voice.

And eventually, if fear goes unchecked long enough, you can be physically alive while emotionally hiding behind locked doors.

That room in John 20 is more than a location. It's a condition. And some of you know exactly what it's like.

Some people are living in locked rooms right now. Locked by anxiety. Locked by disappointment. Locked by shame over what they did when pressure hit.

Because remember: Peter is in that room. The same Peter who once said, "Even if everyone falls away, I never will." The room is not only full of fear. It is full of failed promises. Every time Peter hears silence, he probably hears the echoes of his denial.

And shame has a way of reinforcing fear. Fear says, "Something bad will happen to me." Shame says, "Something bad is because of me". Together, they have a paralyzing effect. That's why the disciples are not strategizing. They are not praying boldly. They are not preparing for the mission. They are surviving.

And maybe that's the clearest sign fear has taken over your life: You stop asking what God has called you to do, **and you start locking doors to live a safer life.**

Fear starts small. Then it slowly begins taking over your life. You stop applying. Stop trusting. Stop speaking. Stop trying. Stop risking. Stop praying bold prayers. Before you know it you are in survival mode just trying to make it through the day.

But there is good news: Jesus cannot be stopped by locked doors and a room thick with fear!

2 | JESUS BRINGS PEACE THROUGH WOUNDS (v.19-20)

I've written a few plays in my life, and if I'm honest, if I were writing this scene, Jesus would burst into the room, blow the door off its hinges, and give some epic speech.

"Stop hiding! The time has come to leave fear behind and be bold and very courageous!"

Or, “Get up, stand on the feet the Lord has given you and take your ground for the kingdom!” (Yes, he in an english accent).

That’s how we expect fearful moments to be handled. We expect intensity. A pep talk. A rallying cry, Braveheart style. A demand to become stronger. But Jesus walks into the room and says one word:

“Peace.” Not shame. Not disappointment. Not correction. Not a rallying cry.

“Peace”.

And what makes this moment so moving is the kind of peace He brings. Because Jesus does not pretend the wounds never happened. He shows them His hands. His side. The scars are still visible. This is not peace through denial. Not peace through distraction. Not peace because circumstances suddenly improved.

This is peace that has gone through hell and back, peace that has passed through suffering and come out victorious on the other side. And for the disciples, this word carried even more weight than it might to us because they lived in an empire obsessed with the language of peace.

Everywhere they went, Rome preached its own gospel: **PAX ROMANA**. The Peace of Rome. Caesar promised peace through power. Peace through control. Peace through total submission. Peace through violence strong enough to silence opposition.

The empire said, “if you are strong enough, if our armies are large enough, if our rule is absolute enough, then maybe the world can finally have peace.” But everyone knew Roman peace came with a sword behind its back.

And now here stands Jesus: not holding a weapon, not standing over His enemies, not wearing a centurion’s armor, but with visible nail wounds in His hands and a spear wound in His side.

20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and side.

Rome achieved peace by creating wounds. **Jesus brings peace through [his] wounds.** That is a completely different kind of kingdom. Isaiah saw this coming centuries earlier:

“He was pierced for our transgressions...the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed.”

Think about how strange that sounds. Usually wounds are proof that violence won. Usually scars are evidence of defeat. But in the resurrection, wounds become evidence that suffering did not have the final word.

Jesus could have resurrected without scars. But he chose to keep them. Why?

Because resurrection does not erase the story! It redeems it! And since Jesus is the firstfruits of resurrection, He shows us something about our future too. The things we fear most—pain, suffering, betrayal, loss, even death itself—do not get the final word over the people of God.

In Christ, our wounds are not ignored. And they are not wasted.

They are not ignored because Jesus shows His scars openly. Meaning your suffering is not invisible to God. The risen Christ still bears the marks of Friday in Sunday's glorified body.

He knows abandonment. He knows injustice. He knows physical pain. He knows grief. He even knows what it feels like to lie in a tomb.

One of the worst human experiences is suffering alone. But because of Jesus, we never do!

And our wounds are not wasted, not because God caused every wound. Not because evil suddenly becomes good. But because resurrection means God can take what was meant for evil and transform it for glory.

The cross looked useless on Friday. But by Sunday it became the salvation of the world. And some of you need to hear this: the wounds you thought disqualified you may become the very place where the resurrection power of Jesus is most visible.

So when Jesus says, "Peace be with you," He is not promising them an easy future. In fact, most of the disciples will suffer greatly. *But his peace means: you will never suffer alone, and your suffering will never be meaningless.*

Never alone. Never without purpose.

LET ME SHOW YOU MY SCAR

Some of you have heard me share this before, but it is probably the deepest scar I carry. I lost my mother when I was two years old.

And even though I was too young to fully understand it then, that wound shaped so much of my life. As I got older, it showed up in sadness, depression, fear,

insecurity...ways of seeing myself and the world that I didn't even fully realize were connected to that loss.

For a long time, that wound felt like proof that something was missing in me. Like life had marked me early. But when I met Jesus, something changed.

Not because the wound disappeared. Not because the story suddenly rewrote itself. But because His wounds became my peace. I realized I was not abandoned. I was not alone. Christ had entered even that wound.

And over time, I began to see something else: **God did not waste that pain.**

I would never call the loss good. But I have watched God bring good from it. Compassion from it. Dependence on Him from it. Even ministry from it.

And maybe that is why I resonate so deeply with this moment in John 20. Because resurrection peace does not mean you no longer carry scars. It means your scars no longer speak louder than the resurrected Christ.

So here's my question: what's your scar?

- What wound have you allowed to define your life?
- What scar still speaks fear over you?
- What pain still feels meaningless?

Because Jesus still walks into locked rooms. And He still says, "Peace be with you."

But Jesus does not calm the disciples so they can remain hidden. Because biblical peace is not an escape from the world: it brings healing for the sake of the world.

3 | PEACE RESTORES PURPOSE (vv.21-23)

And then the story gets even stranger.

21 Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." 22 And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

Jesus walks into the room. Shows them his wounds. Speaks peace over their fear. And then...he breathes on them.

Now I know I am called to imitate Jesus, but if I breathed on you any given Sunday you would probably not come back to this church. Actually, let's try that now...i'm just kidding.

Honestly, what a weird moment. No long discourse. No three-point lecture. No "here's the strategy going forward."

Jesus just says: "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

Notice what Jesus does not say.

He does not say, 'Now that you feel better, go back to normal life.'

He does not say, 'Take a few weeks to recover emotionally.'

He does not say, 'Stay hidden until the world becomes safer.'

Resurrection peace is not given so the disciples can become comfortable. It is given so they can become courageous.

The same men hiding behind locked doors in John 20 will soon stand publicly in Jerusalem announcing the resurrection of Jesus. What changed? They did not suddenly become naturally brave men. They encountered the peace and presence of the Risen Christ.

And this is important: Christian courage is not the absence of fear. It is the presence of Jesus that becomes greater than fear. This is how the gospel moved from a locked room...to cities, nations, and eventually, even to us.

And then he breathes. Why? This seems so odd and out of place. When we consider this deeper, we see that this moment is not random.

John is intentionally taking us back to Genesis. He's already done it various times in his gospel; he's taking us back to communicate something powerful. John is taking us back to the moment when God formed Adam from the dust and breathed into him the breath of life.

In Genesis, God breathes and creates humanity. In John, Jesus breathes the Spirit on them and recreates humanity. This is resurrection becoming a new creation. Jesus is not just calming scared disciples. He is forming a new humanity filled with the Spirit of God and sent into the world with the peace of Christ.

But this peace does not just comfort people and it's not just a casual greeting. **His peace restores their purpose.** *"As the father has sent me, so I send you."* The same

Jesus who entered the locked rooms now sends His people into locked rooms all over the world.

Rooms locked by shame. Locked by fear. Locked by addiction. Locked by grief. Locked by bitterness.

And what is the church sent to announce? Forgiveness, freedom, reconciliation.

Have you ever had the privilege of telling someone their sins are forgiven? It's not as complicated as you might think, especially when you walk in the peace Christ has given you. The peace becomes something attractive within you because it is the peace of God. And Jesus taught his disciples that when we travel about, meeting people and going into homes, we should share our peace. If it is rejected, move on, if it is received, stay and minister.

ASCENSION DAY. This Thursday, Pastor Sean, myself, and a group of pastors and leaders gathered on top of Signal Hill to pray over our city. It happened to fall on Ascension Day, which felt fitting: the risen Christ sending His people into the world.

We split into pairs and began prayer walking through the park below. We were praying: "Lord, fill us afresh with Your Spirit. Give us eyes to see people. Lead us to those far from You."

As I'm walking with my partner, we pass by a few people from our group talking with three teenage guys sitting in a parked car smoking weed. Nothing dramatic. Just ordinary people in an ordinary park.

But the Spirit nudged Carlos: "Ask them if anyone is in pain." One of the teenagers suddenly steps out of the car on crutches. In that moment, they realized: *Jesus was already pursuing them before we ever arrived.*

They prayed for him. God touched his body. And right there in the park, those young men heard the gospel and gave their lives to Jesus.

But then something else happened. Another man approached members of our group and said: "Years ago, when I was a gang member, someone shared Jesus with me in this same park."

Now he walks with God. And he still comes back there to remember what Jesus did in his life. All of that...within about sixty minutes.

Why? Because Jesus exchanged fear for peace for a handful of ordinary disciples who now carry the peace of Christ into the world.

There are millions of people carrying shame they think they must live with forever. People convinced God could never want them. People trapped in locked rooms they think they can never leave.

And Jesus says: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

Church, you are sent carrying the peace of Christ into fearful places.

So wherever your peace is received:
stay awhile.

Listen.

Pray.

Love.

Announce forgiveness.

Declare reconciliation.

Watch what Jesus can do.

From a locked room in Jerusalem...to the ends of the earth...the church becomes the community that announces forgiveness in a fearful world.

RESPONSE

So today, I want to invite you to respond to Jesus with two honest questions.

1. What fear has closed the door on your life?
2. And where is Jesus calling you to walk in peace instead of fear?

Because the resurrection of Jesus is not just about life after death someday.
It is about the peace of Christ entering your fear right now.

And maybe today, you realize you have never actually received the forgiveness and peace Jesus offers.

You've carried shame.

You've carried sin.

You've carried fear.

But Jesus Christ died for you, rose again for you, and now offers you forgiveness, peace, and new life.

So here's the question for you:

Will you receive the peace and forgiveness of Jesus today?

PRAYER & BLESSING.

Praise Jesus that **He transforms fearful survivors into peace-filled witnesses.**