

100 Days in John
Presence, Peace and Power
John 20: 19-23

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The disciples had heard Mary's report: "I have seen the Lord." But they were still trying to grasp the news. Still fearing their own arrest, they had gathered behind doors firmly closed. Then Jesus came to them. Let's walk through the five moments in this lovely scene from the first Easter evening.

1) Jesus Came and Spoke Peace. The room was locked. Jesus wasn't with them. Then he was. The risen Jesus stood right in the middle of his startled disciples. This scene has raised many questions about the resurrection body of Jesus. Was it just his spirit, appearing in the form of the man he was? A kind of ghostly visitation whereby the spirit of Jesus could pass through a locked door? Or was Jesus, perhaps, so *very* solid that doors and walls were merely like passing through a mist? Maybe now the body of Jesus was more real than anything on our earth. Either way, Jesus after rising seems to have the ability to appear and disappear in different places.

As readers, we join the disciples in being startled. We don't know how he did it. But that doesn't matter nearly as much as the fact that Jesus who died now stands in their midst. He's alive. He's with them. And he speaks: "Peace be with you." That's a lovely greeting. The words create what they speak. "Peace. Peace to you. Be at peace."

We can't help but remember the words Jesus spoke to them just a few days and a few chapters earlier. "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" (Jn. 14: 27). These were not empty words. Jesus replaced the fear the disciples felt with the peace of his risen presence. Chaos had churned up their world. Jesus now calms troubled waters. Peace be with you.

Imagine Jesus standing in the midst of your life. Arriving perhaps, in the chair where you sit and pray in the morning. Or in your room as you lie on your bed before sleep. In the moments where you are not doing anything, but only thinking about everything. He arrives. Can you see him? He slips past all locks and defenses. He is there. He smiles at you. Holds out his hands. Speaks kindly: "Peace be with you. It's just as I promised. Death could not defeat me. The powers could not triumph over me. Evil does not have the last word. I am the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore (Rev. 1: 18). You have nothing to worry about. I am the first and the last. I am yours and you are mine. Because I live, you will live also (Jn. 14: 19). Peace be with you." Let him speak those words right into your fears. Hear him say that right to your anxiety. "Peace be with you. I am your peace."

2) He Showed Them His Wounds and They Rejoiced. Jesus removed any doubt about the reality of his risen body. He showed them his hands with the holes from the nails. He showed them his side where the spear had pierced him. This was not a ghost nor an imposter. The man they saw crucified and buried now stood in their midst fully alive and embodied.

Once again, we remember Jesus' words from the night before his death, "You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you" (Jn. 16: 20, 22). As they saw Jesus alive again, his words rang clear like bells on Christmas morning. Their gladness was now as secure as Jesus' resurrected life. Could anyone or anything kill Jesus again? Neither could any power now destroy their joy.

But let's note the startling nature of the proof he gave them. Jesus

showed them his *wounds*. Ponder that. If a beaten, crucified body could rise, wouldn't you think all signs of his hurt would be healed? But Jesus retains the holes in his hands and the breach in his side. He is not ashamed of his injuries. They are not only proof that it was the true, crucified Jesus who rose. They are proof of his love. Not only of his past sacrifice. But that he loves us *now*. "My body is alive and outfitted for everlasting life in heaven. But I've kept these piercings so that you can know the love I showed on the cross lives on in this moment. I meant it, and still do. By my wounds your wounds are healed. I prize these marks. Remember what Isaiah said of me about you, 'Behold I have engraved you on the palm of my hands' (Is. 49: 16). Your name is etched in these nail pierced hands forever."

Once again, see him in your midst. In that secret place where you meet him. See his hands and his side. Like old war veterans, he wants to share scars and stories with you. Show him your wounds. The zipper scar from the heart surgery that changed more than your physical heart. The worn white circle on your finger where once you wore a ring but do so no longer. The puffy eyes when you can hold it in no longer. The fatigue on your face that shows when you think no one is looking. All the wounds of worry in the war of love. He wants to see them. He wants you to know that he keeps your pains tucked up in his side. They fit right into that opening that goes to his heart. Even in sorrow, then, you rejoice, for you are not alone. And in Jesus all is well. All shall be well.

3) He Spoke Peace Again and Sent Them. For a second time, Jesus said "Peace be with you." The first time, he wanted to calm their fears about his sudden appearance. He wanted to assure them that he was really back and alive for evermore. Now he was about to launch them into a new mission. His disciples were squirreled away in fear of meeting anyone who would identify them with Jesus. He was about to send them back out into the world as witnesses to his resurrection. As witnesses to his atoning sacrifice. As witnesses to the truth that Jesus is Lord of all, the one before whom we all must appear. He knew it would scare them. So he assured them first, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."

Once again we have echoes from just a few days earlier. Jesus had prayed to his Father for his disciples. "As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world" (Jn. 17: 18). Jesus saw through the cross to

the future mission of the church. He knew that others would come to believe because his disciples would tell others the news about him. Two thousand years later, we gather here as those who know the mission worked. We heard and we believe. Yet we also know that we have not been given the gospel in order to savor it hidden away from the world in a small group. We too have been sent.

So let's ponder that for a moment. You envision Jesus in your place with him at night or in the morning. You hear him speak peace. You see his wounds. You feel his acceptance and forgiveness, mercy and love. Then the new day dawns and you go back into your usual life. Jesus wants you to know that he is specifically sending you into this life. You might feel that you have so many pressures because so many people will demand things of you this week. Coaches, bosses, parents, teachers, clients, bureaucrats, friends, siblings. That's all true. But what if you and I saw the deeper truth? The sovereign God ordered your life to be now, in this place and at this time and with these people. He sends you every day into the very life you already live. Only now you are sourced in Christ. You have a heavenly starting point. So we are sent to be Christ's people amidst a people who struggle, stumble, wander, rebel, get hurt, cry out and generally do stupid stuff.

Hear him say, "Go be someone who has been with me in the midst of those who are so lonely for me. You may encounter dozens of people in a day or just a few. But you have been sent to each one, to regard them with the Lord's own love. There will be times when you can listen and times when you can speak, to give a reason for the hope and joy that is in you. Yes, sometimes we get sent far away on mission. Sometimes we go to places to serve that we normally avoid. But most of the time most of our lives are spent where we are required. We're sent into the very lives we are leading. Jesus sends you right to the places and people where you live.

4) He Breathed and They Received the Spirit. Jesus did not send the disciples to the world in their own power. In a moment of surprising intimacy, Jesus breathed. Intentionally. Deep enough to be noticeable. Intentional enough to be directed. Jesus breathed out on them: whoooosh. "Receive the Holy Spirit." We're taken all the way back to Genesis where we read that "the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living

creature” (Gen. 2: 7). We’re made alive by God’s Spirit, the breath of life. In rising from the dead, by the power of the Spirit (Rom. 1: 4), Jesus became a new creation. He is the new Adam. And he is the life-giver (1 Cor. 15: 45). Now Jesus breathes his Spirit into our hearts to make us new creations too. Jesus breathes into us and joins us to himself. He blows new life into our hearts. He brings our dead spirits back to life.

Once more, imagine the Jesus who comes to you speaking peace. Imagine his deep exhaling of his Spirit. As he breathes out, breathe in his air, the Holy Spirit he gives. Say as you inhale, “I receive your Spirit.” As you exhale, imagine your breath pressing his Spirit throughout your whole body. Take him in as you breathe in. Let him flow all through you as you breathe out. Every day, in prayer, inhale that Spirit deeply. Christ breathes the Spirit out, we breathe the Spirit in. And now you are sharing in the life of Jesus himself. This is the way Jesus is with you always. This is the way you dwell in his presence. You share breath, you share the Holy Spirit.

Jesus sent his disciples into the world. But they were not sent out in their own name or in their own power. They went out in the power of the Spirit. So we too go into our lives every day needing the Spirit of Jesus to breathe through us. I tried that all last week, especially when I was feeling tired or overwhelmed, when I knew I particularly needed Christ. I breathed in, saying in my heart, “I receive your Spirit.” I breathed out imagining his Spirit flowing through me. He gave me energy and power to do all I had to do, but could not do on my own. So, try it! Ask the Spirit to make ordinary events charged with extraordinary moments of love and witness.

5) He Gave Them His Authority of Forgiveness. As Jesus sent his disciples in the power of his Spirit, he also gave them authority to forgive or to retain sin. This passage is really hard to understand. And it has been badly used throughout our history. I don’t think Jesus means that forgiveness is like a commodity that can be given, bought, sold or dispensed.

Once again, looking back in John, we can see what Jesus meant. “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him...And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light, because their deeds were evil.” Jesus came into the darkness of our

world as a saving, healing light. Many were drawn to the light. But also, many were repelled by that light. They wanted to stay in the darkness of living for and by themselves.

This is still true. We are witnesses that Jesus forgives sins. He transforms lives. For he did it in us. Yet some will pull back from his healing light. They don't want to change. They don't want to hear that they live in rebellion against their Creator. We can't simply stop telling the truth. We say it in love "Look, drinking that darkness is going to kill you. Holding so tight to the illusion of control over your life has put you in conflict with God. It just won't work. There's a better way." Some will be angry. Others will be attracted. And we have news. Paul said it this way, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them...So we implore you on behalf of Christ: be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5: 19-21).

What a passage this is. Jesus gives us so much! His presence, his peace and his Spirit. And he sends us as he was sent. We breathe in his Spirit, and then we exhale his love toward others. We bring his light into a dark world, holding forth the Word of life as we give ourselves in love.