

Peace Among Them
John 20:19-23
Second Sunday of Easter
April 28, 2019
Pastor Dea Sharp, Pikes Peak UMC

John 20:19-23 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

Jesus Appears to the Disciples

¹⁹ When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." ²² When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

I'm still a little in awe of the emotions that Mary and the other women must have had that first day, the day of the resurrection.

Are you?

Have you thought about what they experienced...how THEY must have been changed...to being so doggone sure...and you've taken that *doggone sure* feeling for yourself?

This week's news stories have been another round of "you can't make this up!" The one that makes me nauseous and then addles my brain about what and how to pray...was the article about the president of Union Theological Seminary – a SEMINARY – who told a reporter for Easter publication in the NY Times, that "she doesn't believe in heaven" or miracles of healing told in the gospels, OR Christ's resurrection!¹

Suddenly, "I CAN'T BELIEVE IT" takes on a whole new meaning.

Remember I said last week, we can't be complacent?

With articles like this, about people like that, it seems quite urgent (at least to me) that we'd better stand for something...or we'll stand for nothing!

¹ <https://www.christianheadlines.com/contributors/michael-foust/seminary-president-admits-she-doesn-t-believe-in-heaven-miracles-or-christ-s-resurrection.html>

Ruth just read from the Gospel of John, inspired to be written, I believe, by the “beloved disciple” who Jesus entrusted his mother to as he hung on the cross.

It’s historically documented.

And medically prove-able...a crucifixion happened; a man died and was buried.

And as we recalled and celebrated last Sunday, when the women went to the garden to honor the bloody body with the rituals for a “proper” burial, they found the tomb empty and the angels asked them “why do you look for the living among the dead?”

They got to be the first evangelists to the rest of the world for the rest of time – HE IS RISEN!

Don’t believe in a resurrected Christ, Madam Seminary President?

Let us enlighten you with what WE believe.

We read the account of the empty tomb last Sunday.

The other gospels support that version with Mary Magdalene actually SEEING Jesus; that he spoke to her.

In another place in Scripture, that same evening, a couple of unnamed disciples had their eyes opened after they’d walked with Jesus to Emmaus and he’d broken bread with them.

And we heard more evidence JUST NOW:

“Jesus came and stood among his disciples.” (Jn. 20:19)

Anywhere else, in the Gospel stories, and this wouldn’t’ be a strange statement.

Of course Jesus was among them!

He walked with them.

He ate with them.

They watched and learned HANDS ON.

It happened!

Countless times before, “Jesus among them,” yet this time was different.

This time, the presence of Jesus among the disciples was not only unexpected, but after the events of Thursday night and Friday, it seemed impossible.

For us, though, it ISN'T a surprise is it?

We know the story. And I pray we're living as people with resurrection lives.

Jesus was supposed to be dead and the disciples were afraid for their own lives, which wasn't unreasonable.

The man who they believed was the Messiah was gone.

The story that they'd invested their lives in, appeared to be over.

Not only were they afraid...they were second guessing the last three years!

We live pretty milk-toast lives, don't we?

Except for our veterans, not many of us can say we've risked our lives for something that we believe in or followed after?

We aren't living in China, or God-bless them, Sri Lanka.

We haven't *really* been threatened for our beliefs?

We don't give much thought to how things would be different if our lives were on the line.

So, in the midst of this dark and scary time, Jesus came and stood among his friends and family; his disciples.

I CAN'T BELIEVE IT!

They might have said it.

Probably thought it!

How could it be???

Not only was it a reversal, out-of-bounds possibility...it was OUT of the natural order of things?

YES, MADAM PRESIDENT – miracles DO happen!

Jesus must have sensed their confusion because the first "gift," really, of his return, the first words he speaks were not "SURPRISE!" but "Peace be with you."

This isn't a hallucination.

And their belief in him...about him...and for themselves was not misplaced.

Remember the benediction last Sunday?

The credit for what I quoted is to Tony Evans.

Jesus said, "IT is finished" NOT "I AM FINISHED."

The story's not over.

All hope, for the disciples and us, was resurrected with Christ.

YES – Believe it!

Now, the disciples must have wondered, "What does this real LIVE (pardon the pun) event mean for us?"

With Jesus THEIR story continues! It's not finished either, but what will it require of them?

So, Jesus responds again, knowing their concerns, and repeats, "Peace be with you," AND THEN he continues with, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

Simply, as is his way, Jesus tells the disciples that they're not going to stay in comfort and safety.

His story's not over. Neither is theirs.

They may not have understood (what's new, right?) but this was always the plan. The "what comes next" would require them to go out, into the world, and share the good news of the Resurrection with everyone.

I saw a cartoon this week of the disciple-men saying to the disciple-women "So ladies, thanks for being the first to witness and report the resurrection and we'll take it from here."

Wah. Wah.

Be affirmed ladies, we've got a story to tell!

But, don't you suppose Jesus' instruction made the disciples even more afraid?

How would we have responded?

Trust me, I know, sharing our faith with others can make us feel vulnerable and exposed.

But, at least the folks we're talking to have heard parts of the Easter story. Just imagine what it would have been like to break this story and the news of the Resurrection with somebody that might not have heard of Jesus BEFORE the crucifixion!

Little bit of disbelief? Yeah, just a little.

But God...God gives us more.

If we had read further in John's gospel we would have heard about Thomas. Poor guy gets such a bad rap. He wasn't with the disciples at first...in fact, it's a week later, remember?

I CAN'T BELIEVE IT!

Thomas needed to see it for himself.

And when he does, he declares, "My Lord and my God!" (Jn. 20:28)

CAN'T BELIEVE IT, Madam President?

Real people then...and real people today do!

We have historical evidence.

And there's more!

We've got PEACE!

Jesus said it. We've received it. And as Scripture ALSO records, we're praying it FOR you, Madam, an enemy of the Gospel!

Last week we celebrated an empty tomb.

Today, Dear Ones, we remember and celebrate the peace we've received.

We worship the One who brought this peace, Jesus Christ, who, as we can read in Isaiah (9:6) is the "Prince of Peace."

We celebrate first that we have peace with God.

“Therefore, [Paul writes to the Romans] since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. . . . There is...no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 5:1; 8:1).

A second reason for celebrating is that we have peace with one another. Paul tells the Ephesians:

“For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups [meaning Jews and Gentiles] into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, hostility between us....reconciling both groups to God in one body – through the cross...putting aside hostility through it. (Eph. 2:14-16)

NOT ONLY has Jesus taken and forgiven our sins.
He’s resurrected and proclaiming peace!

And finally, for today: we’re marked by the peace of God; able to live lives IN THE MIDST OF questions and turmoil and outright lies reported in the NY Times, with peace! Paul wrote to the Philippians:

“The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, ...the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus...What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—[Paul says] practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you” (Phil. 4:5b-7, 9).

Jesus came and stood among them.

And I believe, **my Risen Christ** is among US today and always.

He offered the disciples – men and woman disciples – PEACE.

That offer is ours as well.

Thomas may have had doubts but Jesus said, “Do not doubt but believe.”

What are we going to do?

- We have the evidence that Jesus was...
 - Historical records OUTSIDE the Bible and medical research since then – just check Google.
- We have the accounts that Jesus IS...

- God's word, YOUR Bible gives us plenty of accounts of "regular" folks' seeing and touching and eating with the RISEN Christ.

Jesus' words, "Do not doubt but believe," are aimed, not only at Thomas, but also to anyone who reads today's verses (and beyond,) and are struggling to believe that God is able to do the things which God promised.

And our response....to the Christ-given peace....

...and to his command to be sent into the world (as he was sent by God) is "My Lord and my God!"

I CAN'T BELIEVE IT.

Madam Seminary President, you'd **better** believe it.

We are called into the world, as believers, with new understanding and an unending, resurrected life.

When the world around us seems hell-bent on its own destruction, rather than the resurrection and new life, we CAN stand on what we believe, what the Bible tells us and who we are.

Jesus even put a blessing out there *SPECIFICALLY FOR US – OVER 2000 YEARS AGO* when he said to those first day of the resurrection disciples, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." (Jn. 20:29)

Because what other choice do we have Dear Ones?

We believe not because we touched his wounds, but because we have seen Christ in the face of our neighbors, maybe someone sitting next to you - who hasn't seen or touched Christ either, but who live their life in such a way that Christ has been made present among us.

We, just like the first disciples, wanna stay safe, but, too often, we're the "frozen chosen" and allow fear to paralyze us from going out, reaching out, calling out: HE IS RISEN.

But, here we are, gathering together and THE risen Christ is among us and must be made known.

YOU'D BETTER BELIEVE IT!