

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Yes, Easter Sunday was last Sunday, but we're still in the season of Easter, fifty days to be exact called Eastertide. Last week I told some of you about an encounter I had with an employee at Macy's. This week it was at Goodwill on Woodruff Rd. But this time the person recognized me and called on me. "Hey Pastor!," he said. Before I could say anything, he starts in. "Guess what? I am supposed to be getting an apartment today. My first one in a long time! I am so excited, pastor! God is so good! Oh, I'm sorry I'm talking your ears off but even though the buses don't run on Sundays, and it takes me an hour to walk to church at Triune, I want to try and be there because I love my church. You all and the Holy Spirit have done so much for me. I even have a picture of the stained glass window in the front of the church on my phone. Please tell Ms. Melisa hello. She has been working with me to get this housing, and I am so grateful. I should be getting a call any minute. Next will be the furniture and a real bed, but I'm not going to get ahead of myself. I love you, pastor, and I love that I can watch the service on my phone. Thank you, Triune, thank you, Lord, for Triune." As tears welled up in my eyes, I said, "The risen Lord is here, my friend!" "Yes, he is! Yes, he is!," he said. You know the second Sunday in Easter is sometimes known in our culture as "The Week Later" or "Low Sunday." If you look around it's not half as crowded as it was last Sunday. The trumpet isn't sounding. The fresh flowers have died on the cross outside. Sometimes there is a guest preacher. No such luck for y'all. Sorry. People have moved on but have we changed? What's different about us now that Christ is risen? Are we, like the guy I saw in Goodwill, ready to give witness to our belief in the power of the Holy Spirit and the Risen Lord in our lives? There aren't many "Week Later" stories in the Gospels. "Mark is in such a hurry at the end of his that he wraps things up with

the empty tomb. Matthew adds a few lines about Jesus appearing to the disciples in Galilee, commissioning them to carry on. Luke tells the story of a stranger who met up with two disciples on the road to Emmaus on Easter evening, but the encounter didn't last long. The minute the disciples recognized the stranger as he broke bread with them at supper, he was carried up into heaven and out of their sight. **John is the Gospel writer who lingers on what it's like to be a disciple after Easter.** He's the only one with a famous Week Later story- the one about Jesus and a disciple named Thomas" (Barbara Brown Taylor, *Always A Guest*). It's the story of Doubting Thomas- you know the one who suffered from FOMO- "Fear of Missing Out" because he wasn't there in the beginning of the story that we'll read in a few minutes? But for the first time when this story comes up in the lectionary every three years, I am opting not to include the section about Thomas because I think we always miss what comes right before it. So we're going to focus on what Thomas didn't get to experience- at first because he wasn't there. Feel free to read the rest of his four verses of fame on your own. According to John, when Mary Magdalene, the first witness at the tomb on Easter morning, ran to tell the other disciples that Jesus wasn't there, several of them raced off to see for themselves. Then they joined the others back in the locked upper room later that evening because they were afraid, that's where we pick up today. I love that a short seven days after we shout, "Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed!," John "invites us to face our doubts, speak our fears, and yearn for more- more intimacy, more encounter, more experience of the living, breathing Christ (Debie Thomas, [www.journeywithjesus.net](http://www.journeywithjesus.net)). So before we turn to God's word for us this day, let us first pray. **PRAY. READ.**

Last week in celebrating Christ's resurrection, I said, "You can crucify God's love but you can't keep it dead and buried (William Sloane Coffin)." In today's story in John, we see once again that Jesus always finds a way to show love, and he found a way into the locked upper room- more than likely the same room where Jesus had shared the last Supper with his disciples before his crucifixion. Now the risen Lord appeared to them in that same upper but locked room. No, not locked doors, not death nor anything else in all creation will keep us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:38-39). I find it interesting that in last week's resurrection day story in Matthew, it was the Roman guards who were paralyzed by fear and this week in John's Gospel, it is the disciples who are paralyzed by their fear- locked in a tomb, I mean, an upper room. Perhaps this is why we sang, "If you walk out of the tomb, I'm walking, too" last week?! "Good news does not erase fear. Good news, incredible news, can ignite hope, but even hope does not eliminate genuine fear. An empty tomb isn't enough to confirm all that Jesus promised is true. What does resurrection mean? It means God still shows up" (Joy J. Moore, [workingpreacher.org](http://workingpreacher.org)). Yes, Jesus is on the loose for in the midst of their fear and locked door, the Resurrected Jesus appears and greets his disciples by saying, "Peace be with you." Then he showed them his hands and side and THEN...THEN... they rejoiced when they SAW the Lord. Only after seeing Jesus' hands and side did they rejoice. Reassurance is an antidote to fear, isn't it? "It serves as a way for humans to confront the unknown in a way that moves them from paralysis to action. Jesus' presence provides the reassurance they need. In the middle of their fear, Jesus speaks of peace" (Michael Joseph Brown, [workingpreacher.org](http://workingpreacher.org)). Why did Jesus say "Peace be with you" to a group of fearful people? And why are they afraid? For fun let's go with the second question

first. John tells us they're afraid because of the Jews. Let me be clear. They aren't talking about all of the Jews. More than likely they're talking about the people who crucified Jesus but didn't they, in some way or another, participate in crucifying him as well?! Aren't they themselves Jews? It isn't clear who they are really afraid of? Jewish authorities? The crowd? Themselves? All of the above? Regardless, they are spooked. What has you spooked these days? So spooked that you hide behind locked doors or shut off your heart? I know for me that I hide when I am hurt or when I don't want to seek reconciliation at that time. I'm a recovering people pleaser, and I can easily hide behind locked doors when I feel unfairly attacked. What about you? What makes you hide behind real or metaphorical locked doors or hearts?

Jesus said, "Peace be with you." But why? Yes, "peace" was a standard Jewish greeting or word of departure but did Jesus mean something else by these words? Let's explore some possibilities. "Peace" is rooted in the Jewish concept of shalom. These are the same words Jesus spoke at the Last Supper in Chapter 14 of John's Gospel. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid" (v. 27). Peace can also mean fullness of life. Perhaps Jesus was saying to them that he wishes all that can be possible for them. "The Greeks and Romans associated the idea of peace with the inner nature of human beings frequently connected to the absence of conflict or war. The Roman peace was enforced by violence. It was the absence of conflict through military conquest, surveillance, and oppression. The Hebrews, by contrast, tended to use the term primarily for interpersonal or social relations, where it comes very close to meaning justice.

When justice is done, it is seen as God's gift to the people. Christ's peace comes from the victory over evil through the absorption of suffering" (Michael Joseph Brown, [workingpreacher.org](http://workingpreacher.org)). Unfortunately, the difference between Jesus' peace and the world's peace is never really explained in John. The closest we may come is found in Chapter 16 (v. 33) where Jesus says, 'I have said this to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world, you have tribulation, but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.' "Jesus gives peace that provides solace in the face of persecution, a promise of new possibilities, and confidence in his ability to overcome 'the world.' In John's Gospel, 'the world' usually indicates a hostile and ignorant response to the truth that Jesus embodies" (Matt Skinner, [workingpreacher.org](http://workingpreacher.org)). Jesus says "Peace be with you" TWO times- he gives a double dose of peace- and on the second go 'round Jesus adds that as the Father has sent him so he is sending his disciples (v. 21). This is obviously a commissioning but are these disciples really in a condition to be effective disciples one might ask? Jesus obviously thinks they're ready, as he has equipped and empowered them and us through the reception of the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus promise to send. Earlier in John's Gospel, in Chapter 15 (v. 26), Jesus said he would send an advocate, a counselor, to aid us in our understanding of mysterious things in faith. And yes, conviction comes from the Holy Spirit. The human mind wants evidence, and the heart needs deeper assurance and reassurance in times of fear and doubt. John knew that evidence wasn't enough. The Spirit is the one who gifts us with faith. In fact, to own the mystery of resurrection is a gift of grace (Schmit). And so...Jesus gives them divine CPR (Taylor). He breathes the Holy Spirit onto them and says, "Receive the Holy Spirit." In the presence of fear, uncertainty, and unbelieving, Jesus brings peace

and comfort, not only with mere words of reassurance, but also with the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is John's version of Pentecost. It's also a nod to Genesis when God breathed first life into Adam and then Eve. They also hid in fear. But I digress...And then there's this last verse about forgiveness. What's that about and why is it there? We must begin to understand this verse within the context of John's Gospel. There are many different takes, good and bad, on this but one train of thought I really resonate with, and I want to share it with you to ponder is this. "Jesus is not appointing the church as his moral watchdog; nor does he commission it to arbitrate people's assets and liabilities on a heavenly balance sheet. In John's Gospel, Jesus talks about sin as unbelief, the unwillingness or incapacity to grasp the truth of God manifested in him. To have sin abide, therefore, is to remain estranged from God. The consequence of such a condition is ongoing resistance. Sin in John is not about moral failings; primarily it is an inability or refusal to recognize God's revelation when confronted by it, in Jesus. Consequently, the resurrected Christ tells his followers (all his followers) that, through the Spirit that enables them to bear witness, they can set people free or release them from that state of affairs. Failure to bear witness, Jesus warns, will result in the opposite; a world full of people left unable to grasp the knowledge of God. That is what it means to 'retain' sins. Jesus is not- at least, not in this verse, granting the church a unique spiritual authority. He is simply reporting that a church that does not bear witness to Christ is a church that leaves itself unable to play a role in delivering people from all that keeps them from experiencing the fullness that Jesus offers" (Skinner), which is peace. Yes, peace is active fullness of life wished upon someone, which is why I always sign my emails with "Peace"- with a capital "P."

Church, community of faith gathered and sent, the beautiful part of this passage to me is that “Peace be with you” frames the idea that in order to move away from fear, we, as a community, must constantly expect Jesus to show up. Though we are Easter people, none of us are promised safety and an easy, long life. What we’re promised though is that through receiving the Spirit, we receive Jesus. “We are invited to come to the Lord’s Table, to open our empty hands, to touch and taste for ourselves. On this Sunday- whether we experience it as Low Sunday or approach it as the Second Sunday of Easter- Jesus still has the power to give us what we need” (Martin B. Copenhaver, *FOW*). To sum it up...

Do you feel afraid? **Jesus says ‘peace be with you’**

Do you feel you’ve let God down? **Jesus says ‘peace be with you’**

Do you hear God calling you? **Jesus says ‘I am sending you’**

Do you feel empty or inadequate? **Jesus says ‘receive the Holy Spirit’**

Have you been shutting God out of your life? **Jesus says ‘peace be with you’**

Do you want to know that Jesus is real? **Jesus says ‘touch, taste and receive me in the bread and the wine’**

*Breathe on us, breath of God, fill us with life anew, that we may love the way you love, and do what you would do.* Jesus lives- not apart from us, but in and through us. As followers of Christ, we can leave our locked rooms or hearts behind and together tackle pressing issues in our communities, like we do through GOAL. Jesus has offered us a double portion of peace to breathe again. May we take him up on it! Peace be with you all. Amen.