

Resurrection's First Words

John 20:19-31

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." ²⁴ But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

²⁶ A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." ²⁸ Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹ But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Someone called the previous Lent, "The Lentiest Lent we ever Lented," and at this point we could all probably use a vacation. As COVID-19 keeps us sheltering-in-place it is safe to say we are all feeling the strain. The children are getting restless. The adults aren't doing much better. Even our dog is looking at us like, "When am I going to get a break from y'all?" Inside of life under quarantine, we are all beginning to wonder *when will things get back to normal?*

I imagine it is what the disciples are asking themselves too while they are sequestered from the world as well. Afraid to go out in public. Exhausted from the crisis of the current events. Probably eating and drinking too many carbs like the rest of us. Their reality has been turned upside down and they are probably wondering like we are, *can things ever get back to normal?*

Well, if we can say anything about the night after Jesus was resurrected, it's that it wasn't normal. Jesus was dead, and now he isn't. Jesus appears out of nowhere, walking through the locked door to meet them. Not normal. So when one of the disciples—Thomas—misses the moment, and after everyone else tells him that Jesus is alive, he doubts it. I mean, who wouldn't? Resurrection isn't normal. So the text is sure to tell us that Thomas has a twin, and after going through the Lentiest Lent we ever Lented I am beginning to wonder if the doubter's twin is really meant to be us.

But what struck me the most about today's story isn't doubt. It's the three resurrection words Jesus offers his friends while they are struggling.

Notice: The first word he speaks to them is, “Peace be with you.” He doesn’t ridicule or judge them for their fear. He doesn’t preach at them or tell them a parable. He simply keeps showing up again and again—saying three times in this pericope alone, “Peace.” And the beautiful thing about this story is the disciples don’t have to go looking for the peace Christ offers. Instead, peace finds them.

To the ongoing anxiety, grief, weariness and stress of what it has been like to be inside of this crisis together, resurrection word to us is, “Peace. Peace. Peace.”

The second word Jesus offers is a reminder of our calling: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” For me, it is a reminder that whatever situation we find ourselves in, our vocation remains the same: To care for one another and tend to the wounds of our communities by working toward peace and justice. There was an article in the paper yesterday about a fifteen-year-old girl who noticed that there was a two-bag rule on the buses—only two bags allowed per person. Something stirred in her spirit and she began wondering how people who use the bus to go grocery shopping could do so with only two bags, especially in food desert areas. So she contested the rule, because it makes no sense, and changed it.

We are noticing a lot of wounds in our system right now that shouldn’t be considered normal: healthcare, education, transportation, inequities. And perhaps we can use this time as a church to be proactive by focusing our attention on what will need our urgent care when this crisis is over. It strikes me that Jesus is recognized by those who were closest to him not by his accent or even how he looks. He is recognized by his wounds, which is true for too many and the communities they live in.

The truth is, none of us asked for this which is why Jesus’ third resurrection word hits so close to home for me. He tells his disciples that they are to forgive. I mean, why doesn’t he tell them to spread the message that he’s really alive, or to go and galvanize a movement, or at least to start feeding people? Because we can’t fully live into resurrection’s reality, if we are holding onto something from our past. While I keep asking “when will things get back to normal” I am not sure normal is possible after something like this. Which is why those who are protesting to force things back to normal is not only dangerous for themselves and others, but it isn’t possible.

We can’t force things back to the way things were. It is not how resurrection works.

There is a saying in recovery groups that no seed can germinate in the soil of resentment. And we are sensing a lot of resentment and blame being tossed around right now as people grow impatient about riding out this storm. And as difficult as forgiveness is for all of us, Jesus seems to suggest new life isn’t possible without it.

I am grateful that Easter is a season and not just a one-day affair. Because we are going to need every minute to consider what new thing God is doing in our lives and in our world. I have no doubt God is in the midst of this, using what is happening to open our eyes and bring forth transformation, peace, and justice to those willing to receive it.

Three resurrection words for us to contemplate while being on lock down: peace, calling, forgiveness. I pray you find all three in our current situation. More, I pray they find you. Amen.