

Psalm 16

1 Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge.
2 I say to the LORD, "You are my Lord;
I have no good apart from you."
5 The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup;
you hold my lot.
7 I bless the LORD who gives me counsel;
in the night also my heart instructs me.
8 I keep the LORD always before me;
because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.
9 Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices;
my body also rests secure.
10 For you do not give me up to Sheol,
or let your faithful one see the Pit.
11 You show me the path of life.
In your presence there is fullness of joy;
in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

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."

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.

Message from Pastor John

April 19, 2020

“The first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear.”

That sounds to me almost like a quote from today's news rather than a 2000 yr old report from John's Gospel!

Behind locked doors and fearful. Know the feeling?

I know there are at least moments some days when that is a fairly accurate description of my situation.

We all have at least frustration and stress if not outright fear and a feeling of helplessness.

Perhaps we can use our present experience to also better appreciate the last words of John's chapter:

“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. 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.”

Walter Brueggemann preaching on this passage many years ago reduced the essence of its meaning to:

“He came. He stood. He said.”

Three quick verbs for the power of the Risen Christ to disrupt their fear. To push out all helplessness and instead to invade their hearts with a new strength and purpose.

He came.

Scripture promises time and time again that “God is with us.”

Mary's child had been named Emmanuel, meaning “God is with us.”

The Word made flesh-Jesus said, “Remember, I am with you, always, to the end of the age.”

A central point of our faith and all the teaching about God and yet a fact that we so often forget.

The disciples forgot.

Here in that room of worry and terror. Right there with them in their pain and confusion Jesus came.

His presence was real, dispelling all negativity and exerting unstoppable power!
No one else speaks. No one else could say a word.
Jesus, though dead, lives.
Jesus is here!

He stood.

This was no imagining, this was no dream. He was actually in the room. He was standing there close by.

As he had done as they walked, preached, healed and traveled the dusty roads. He was standing amongst them and they could again look to him and lean on him when faced with opposition and treachery.

His presence had calmed their minds but his standing was not just in their minds and hearts. It was physical.

So physical that it occurred a second time and Thomas wanted to reach out and touch. So physical that Jesus tells him to go ahead!

He said.

“Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

This Peace is not just for our inner self. This Peace is not so that we can sleep easy without a care, smug in our closeness to God.

This Peace is not simply a comfort for our distress.

No! This Peace is fuel. Fuel to motivate, disturb, enthuse and encourage us.

This is not just a cure for our fears this is a Command, a Mission, a job to be done!

The Easter message is all-embarrassing and universal. Meant for all and the only way all can know is if we tell them.

The disciples were to tell Jesus's story, tell of His healing, tell of His teaching.

They were to demonstrate “Jesus life style” in all they do.

How are we to follow their example?

I remember being asked to talk to some 5th graders who were worrying on a unit about World Religions. I was to talk about the Bible and what it meant to me.

Before I said a word the teacher warned me, “Try not to be like the pastor we invited last year. He seemed to think the Bible was a club and his role was to use it to beat some faith into the kids.”

A stern warning and a challenge! Speaking to the fact that many people, inside and outside the church, believe that “to make disciples, baptize and teach” requires us to degrade, insult and coerce others.

No wonder Evangelism is a bad word and scares us into silence and paralysis.

Coming and standing amongst his loved ones Jesus told them, **“If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”**

Forgive NOT retain! Forget NOT remember! Put aside NOT keep front and center! Jesus was never triumphalist or aggressive when he spread the Word of God. Jesus's command to spread the Good News means to introduce others by example. To live lives which break down barriers between us and them; to stop imagining we have all the answers and claiming our answers are the only ones which are “right”; to serve rather than lord it over others; to put you before me.

When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.

Not only did He come, stand and say - Jesus gave-- and promised the ongoing power of God.

This was not just a one-off appearance, this was an assurance of God's eternal presence, help and direction.

This tells us that God is not tied to one place or time or tradition or event.

The story of the Bible repeats it over and over again.

The life, death and resurrection of Jesus was to be proof for all and for all time.

God is present, alive and active.

But do we yet accept it!

We are not alone, we are not lost, we are not solely dependent on our own limited skills, intuition or even entrepreneurship.

Emmanuel -God is here.

The church has not lasted for 2000 yrs on its own initiative. The church has never done anything right without God.

And neither do we.

A recent cartoon, you may have seen, has the Devil saying to God, “Look I have closed all the church buildings. I win” and God replies, “And look I have opened a church in every believers home.”

This is a time when the Good News can bring not just comfort to us but also an opportunity to spread Christ's love by showing our faith, our confidence, our love, our forgiveness and our concern.

Rather than cowering behind closed doors in fear. Especially when that describes our spiritual state as well as our physical state ...

Heed the words of the Psalmist:

**I keep the LORD always before me;
because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.
9 Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices;
my body also rests secure.**

And hold fast to the Word of God contained in John's Gospel which is meant for you this day :

“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.”
Amen.