

SERMON “BE AT PEACE” John 20:19-31, RSV

This past Sunday, we gathered as believers for a special day in the Christian church. We came together to remember the resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ, who came among us, endured suffering and death on the cross, and arose on the third day. He came so we might have a new life and relationship with God, bringing us hope, joy, and peace. But who would have imagined there would be horrible deaths and unbearable grief so quickly after observing his resurrection? Look at what happened in Louisville, Kentucky, the shooting, the killing, and the fear. We must remember that His Resurrection wasn't all about joy and happiness. When Jesus came to His disciples, they were assembled privately, perhaps at the home of one of their members in Galilee. They were together behind locked doors, believing their lives were in jeopardy because of threats from the Jewish leaders. They also had thoughts and uncomfortable feelings about deserting Jesus during His persecution. However, they needed to be together, perhaps to pray or meditate. I wonder if they had forgotten what Jesus promised, that on the third day, he would rise again.” At the moment, the disciples seemed only concerned about themselves instead of continuing with the work of Christ.

That same evening, the first day of the week, a Sunday, Jesus unexpectedly appeared in the locked room with His disciples, saying to them, “Peace be with you.” The writer of this Gospel, John, doesn't say that Jesus' disciples were afraid, but they acknowledged him with receiving hearts. Why did Jesus greet them, saying, “Peace be with you”? What did he mean? Jesus wanted to show compassion and was ready to reconnect. He knew they were troubled, needed support, and needed him. So, Jesus did

as He promised, arose again, and met them in Galilee. “Peace be with you” is a greeting, saying that things will be all right or ok. He spoke these words with compassion and, indirectly, showed His forgiveness. Being threatened by the Jewish leaders, the disciples became afraid, denied Jesus, and fled. Peter was one of them who said he would go all the way with Jesus, but he also rejected him three times. The disciples were afraid to bear the burden of suffering and die like Jesus.

Although the disciples’ refused and ran away, Jesus returned on the third day as promised, showing compassion, and saying, “Peace be with you, or shalom.” Then He showed his hands and side to convince them it was him. He repeated these exact words as if he wanted them to do something for Him, and he did. Jesus said, “As the Father has sent me, even so, I send you.” After breathing on them, he said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you keep the sins of any, they are kept.” Jesus unexpectedly said these powerful words to encourage them. He spoke to their hearts and minds, hoping they would always believe and trust Him in all circumstances. He wanted them to overcome their fears and be bold in their faith. Jesus also hoped they would continue His ministry or mission, beginning in Galilee, Judea, and to the uttermost parts of the world. We can call Jesus’ commissioning them, “the great commission.” His commissioning marked the beginning of the Christian Movement. The disciples were to go out, make disciples, and be witnesses of what Jesus had done and would do through them.

Now, today, as disciples of Christ we must consider that Jesus' commissioning wasn't only limited to His disciples. Jesus also speaks to us, calling us to go and be witnesses. We are to leave behind our comfortable places and accept our uncomfortable missions and go as He sends us. We have been commissioned to go and must do His work. We shouldn't close our doors or keep them locked like the disciples. We must leave the doors open and make room so Christ can use us differently, however, that may be. He wants to speak to our hearts and use our minds and souls for His work. What is our chief end? Our chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Our Lord must and can be glorified by using us to proclaim the "Good News" to those hurting, those in need, and who are troubled. Jesus spoke words of peace to the disciples and breathe the Holy Spirit on them. He didn't say their mission would be easy but complex and challenging. He did, however, promise to be with His disciples and also promised to be with us. Therefore we must keep trusting Him that He will be with us and guide us with His Holy Spirit.

As we continue to reflect on our mission for Jesus, I must say we are living in precarious times. Let's look again at Louisville. Look at the constant shooting and killing, which can happen anywhere. Look at the political unrest in this Country and around the world. Look at Russia and Ukraine, the continuous shooting and killing of each other. Look at the Israelis and the Palestinians fighting one another. We are living in difficult days. We are living in a time of wars and rumors of wars and nation against nation. We are facing difficult challenges every day in unusual places and times. What can we do; what should we do? Jesus spoke of troubling times before his return. What

can we do to make peace and live in peace? Is it possible? Is there hope for our future? Can peace genuinely exist, and where do we go from here? We can and must go from here. We must keep moving. We must keep doing, doing what God would have us do.

In our final thought, peace is a gift freely given. We need peace daily. Peace within ourselves and with one another. Jesus spoke peace to the disciples, saying, “My peace, I leave you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not be afraid.” These words are easy to say; doing them is another matter. There are, however, times when we can only pray, saying, “God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.” Yes, times will come when we can’t find peace, but we can pray. I believe prayer can change things. Let’s keep praying. Let’s keep seeking peace. Then, we can all be at peace with ourselves and others in the Lord. Amen.

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