



Sermon for Second Sunday of Easter

*John 20:19-31*

Sunday, April 8th • Second Sunday of Easter

First Federated Church of Peoria, Illinois

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Text:

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side.

Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”

John 20:19-31

Jesus was a teacher. He traveled all over the Galilee and to Jerusalem teaching. He taught the crowds that followed Him. He taught in the Temple. It was the disciples who were there whenever he taught. They were his students day in and day out for three years. From the Gospels, we learn that the disciples didn't always understand what Jesus was teaching.

This reminds me of my time teaching high school math. My favorite course to teach was Geometry. You might recall that in school students learn arithmetic and then algebra. These are closely related. Then comes Geometry. It is completely different. Students can be math whizzes and then get to geometry and be completely lost. Geometry is a complete game changer.

My favorite course included teaching two column proofs. ( given, statement, reasons). At first, students perceive it as foreign, like it is out of left field. Two-column proofs require thinking differently and synthesizing previous and new knowledge. It is different kind of math. Students will be going along and all feel like it is going well, and then they are thrown a curveball. It could be a new theorem or changing topics from shapes to parallel lines. When that happens, students have to pick up their shattered confidence and get back at it.

Geometry is mind bending at times, but perseverance pays off. Eventually, students reach their “Ah Ha” moment and it would click.

Like my geometry students, the disciples persevered with Jesus. They thought they were getting it. And then he said he would die. Curve ball. They gathered with Christ in the Upper Room, where Jesus washed their feet and shared the Passover meal with Him. Such an intimate evening. Then he announced that one of them would betray him, and another would deny him three times before the cock crowed. Curveball. And then he died. Curve ball.

Minds were blown. Confidences were completely shattered. Living into their humanity the disciples base instincts were fight, flight or freeze. They chose flight and scattered.

In our scripture this morning, it has been three days since Christ's death and the disciples have gathered together again, possibly in the upper room. The doors are closed and locked. Those gathered are fearful that they would be accused and punished as Christ had been. Earlier in the day, Mary Magdalene came to them and told them how Christ had revealed himself to her at the empty tomb. This didn't seem to take away their fear. The disciples are cowering together, hiding, when Jesus came and stood among them.

The Risen Lord appeared to the disciples to give them gifts. These same gifts are ours also. Let's examine those gifts this morning.

Jesus appeared to the disciples to give them peace. Two times Jesus extends to them the greeting, “Peace be with you.” This both communicates to us the extent of their fear and how Christ's presence brings peace. This is the peace that is available to us when we are baptized or profess saving faith in Jesus Christ. This is the peace spoken of in Philippians 4:7 “ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

The disciples were gathered together, scared of the mobs of people who had just demanded the crucifixion of their teacher, the man they left their lives and families for. Their world was turned upside down and they were cowering in the shadows. It was the peace and presence of Christ that turned their mourning and fear into rejoicing and gladness.

Jesus came to the disciples that first Easter evening to bring them peace.

The Resurrected Christ also came to give new life. Verse 22 says “And when he had said this, he breathed on them” What an odd thing to read! When we read Scripture and note similarly odd comments or phrases, there is usually a great insight behind them. The early readers of the Gospel of John would have instantly been reminded of two passages from the Old Testament. The first is Genesis 2:7. (read from Bible) This is the account of the creation of humankind.

The second is Ezekiel 37 in the passage of the Valley of Dry Bones. There is a valley full of dry bones like skeletons. Starting in verse 7 we read...(read from Bible). This is an account of bringing new life to something that was dead.

Christ died and rose again so that we could be new creations, so that we could have new life. Thanks be to God!

The Risen Christ appeared to pronounce the gift of new life.

In addition to peace and new life, the Risen One came to give us the Holy Spirit. “Receive the Holy Spirit!” The verb here means “To take upon oneself, to lay hold of, to make one’s own” “Receive the Holy Spirit”

In a few weeks we will celebrate Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came upon those who believed in the Risen LORD. This is the account of Pentecost according to John’s Gospel. We receive the Holy Spirit when we have a saving faith in Jesus Christ or at our Baptism, whichever comes first. This morning Ivy June Sheley will be/has been baptized. She will have/has the presence of the Holy Spirit within her.

Just as we have to choose daily to surrender to Jesus Christ and pick up our cross each day, we also have to choose to daily acknowledge and rely on the Holy Spirit.

I was baptized and raised at Northminster Presbyterian Church here in Peoria. I learned of God the Father and Jesus Christ, His Son. In fact, it was when I was four years old and asked Rev. Dr. Roane Deckert if Jesus would come back as a baby or in some other way, that he identified a call on my life to be a pastor. But it wasn’t until I was 28 years old that I began to understand and get to know the Holy Spirit.

Unfortunately, my experience isn’t uncommon. Too many of God’s children don’t know or experience the presence of the Holy Spirit. May this be the day that this changes for those of us gathered here. You see, Jesus knew that we couldn’t do this life on our own. When we try to live our life without the power of the Holy Spirit, we are choosing to NOT accept the companionship and help Christ died and sent us. It is the Holy Spirit that enables us to live our lives in our fallen human state

and yet live life as a new creation. It is the Holy Spirit that is God's presence inside us, reminding us of the light and love we have in Christ Jesus.

The game changer in my relationship with the Holy Spirit was my experience through a non-denominational ministry called The Great Banquet. The Great Banquet is a 72 hour Christian encounter weekend, where attendees focus on their relationship with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Great Banquet is modeled after the parable of the same name and takes place every spring and fall. Men and women have their own weekends. While I attended my Banquet in Decatur, IL, there is now a Great Banquet community here in Peoria that utilizes Northminster's church building. If setting aside three days to check out of your every life and check into focusing on your relationship with our Triune God resonates with you, I am happy to sponsor you to be a guest at the Great banquet. Please see me after worship today or contact the office to get my contact information. I would like for each of you to have an opportunity to encounter the Holy Spirit like I did on my weekend.

Chris the Lord is Risen! (He is risen indeed) He returned to his disciples to give them, and us the gifts of His peace, new life, and the presence of the Holy Spirit. All who have saving faith in Christ or who are baptized have these gifts.

Let us all commit today to choose to receive the Holy Spirit and live our lives in His power. In so doing we will be living as new creations with the peace of Christ. We will also be living examples for those who have been baptized into the body, fulfilling the vow we made at their baptisms.

Please join me in prayer.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ, who bore the pain of our sins, overcame death and was resurrected so that we could have His peace, new life, and the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. Help us be mindful of your Holy Spirit this week. Reveal yourself through it and draw us closer to you. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.