

**“Peace be with You.”**  
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Connecting To Fear

This is a story about peace. Jesus’ hope for us. It is the peace that Jesus brings to his disciples after a time of fear and agony. Most people have had times when they felt afraid and hurt. Experiencing Christ’s peace is not an absence of violence, it is a place for enlivening energy. I felt Christ’s peace the most at Holy Smokes yesterday. It was a day when we moved beyond our fear and invited everyone to the St. Dunstan’s campus. We had delicious food (including meat, or so I am told). Together, we enjoyed fellowship in the sun.<sup>1</sup>

There they are, sitting in a locked room, by themselves, frozen in fear, not sure what is going to happen next. How can they continue their ministry without their beloved teacher? They have heard Jesus was risen, but has he? If he has what does that mean? Will they be the next ones crucified by the government? They are afraid and probably a bit frustrated.

Why Jesus Invites Peace

These disciples were rightfully afraid. They had reason to be frustrated about not knowing the way forward. When someone thinks about peace, they often think of the absence of violence. For example, praying for peace in Ukraine or among two siblings. Someone prays for peace. Yet, here Jesus wants the disciples to find the peace that can only be obtained by knowing Him. He wants them to see that despite all the fear and questions there is a rest in God that cannot be found in the outside world.<sup>2</sup> It is a peace that transcends hurt.

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<sup>1</sup> Original Example Pre-Holy Smokes A friend of mine recently told me about her own situation, which sounded frustrating and fearful. Now, she is one of those calm yoga-doing people, so I am going to transfer my less calm easier to frustrate feelings upon her. One day, she was commuting to work from Houston to a nearby suburb when she approached a train track. Of course, there was a train on the track. Now, being a very responsible woman, she had left 45 minutes early so she was not at all concerned when the train came to a stop. She had a car in front of her and a city driver behind her. There was no way for her to turn around. She was completely stuck. So she did what the disciples in the Gospel story: she waited.

Thirty minutes went by and she watched as the unhoused people were throwing their bags across the track and going through the train. Likely feeling a bit irritated (not having that peace) after about forty five minutes, she went to the city truck driver and asked him if he would turn around. He was being paid by the time not the mile. Another fifteen minutes went by.

The police came and said there were reports of people on the track and so she would have to continue to wait. My friend sat in her car, spoke to friends, and she radiated Christ’s peace. She waited and eventually the way was clear. Sometimes, in life, someone has to make their own way such as the people who are unhoused in the story that I told before.

<sup>2</sup> Brooks, G.B. (2022). <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/second-sunday-of-easter/commentary-on-john-2019-31-19>

## Exegetical Notes

Each person in that locked room remembered all of Jesus' ministry: the healings, the teachings, and the prophecies. I believe that every one of these disciples would have believed Jesus was The Messiah at some point. Until, fear began to creep into their minds. Fear is an enemy and it can be a challenge to understand it. Fear makes someone find fault in any situation. Fear paralyzes movement and a person can stand on the tracks.

The peace of God that presents itself is clear: it is what moves someone away from the fear they feel. Jesus' peace is a call to action and a new way of life. Jesus has been through Holy Week with these disciples. Jesus knew the way that they would fall short of standing by his side.

He had been with them during the ride to Jerusalem, He sat at the table turned altar and shared the last supper with them. Jesus showed them how to minister: as a servant where no job is too small. And then, Jesus died for them. They have heard from Mary that Jesus is risen. Let me be very blunt here: the disciples might have thought the grief was taking over her mind at this point. It is an understandable assertion. Part of grief is denial. So, their reaction to Mary's news was simple: we can move forward. The reaction was clear: they would hide. It was fight or flight and the disciples chose flight.

Jesus tells them to have peace twice in this Gospel reading, because the disciples are likely unsure of where their relationship with Jesus stands.<sup>3</sup> They are wondering how he will interact with them after every single one abandoned Jesus at the cross. Perhaps Peter is wondering how Jesus can look him in the eyes if he denied Jesus three times. Yet, they do not understand that Jesus loves them anyway. Regardless of their past action: Jesus forgives and sees them as whole. They are his most beautiful beloved.

Including Thomas.

Thomas would have died for Jesus. Way back at Lazarus' death (also in the Gospel of John), when Lazarus was dead, he offered to follow Jesus to the death.<sup>4</sup> Jesus, as any good leader both then and now, wanted his disciples to find peace. Thomas most of all is afraid. Since he was not in the room with the disciples: he has questions. Having questions in faith is acceptable; when Jesus stands before Thomas, he invites the question and gives a response.

When Thomas begins to proclaim Jesus in front of him, Jesus gives a response that reaches to each of us today. "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."<sup>5</sup> The last part is for every person that will believe in Jesus after Thomas. The Disciples had the benefit of seeing to believe. That benefit is rarely available afterwards.

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<sup>3</sup> Sloyan, G. (2022). *John: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. Louisville: Westminster: John Knox Press.

<sup>4</sup> John 11:16

<sup>5</sup> John 20:29

The Disciples recognize Jesus when he enters the room calling for them to find His peace in their hearts. Thomas recognizes Jesus when he is standing with outstretched arms.<sup>6</sup> It can be a challenge to see Jesus at different times in different places: Especially when someone is afraid.

### Being Afraid of Others

Jesus wants the disciples to experience his peace so that then they can spread the same peace to others. We are witnessing Jesus' commission to the Disciples.<sup>7</sup> Jesus, at this moment is telling the disciples that despite everything that has gone wrong in the world, despite the hurt, fear, and persecution they will experience, there will be a peace beyond understanding. Jesus wants them to know that peace is open to all. The disciples will minister to Jews and Gentiles alike.

The Gospel says that the disciples were afraid of the Jews.<sup>8</sup> These disciples are Jewish. They are afraid of themselves. They are afraid of misunderstandings regarding how they understand God. This is not an antisemitic remark: it is a commentary about their faith.

Jesus tells them not to fear any of that: they will minister to Jews and they will minister to Gentiles. Those they minister to will not look like they expected. This is the same message that we receive today, we will spread Christ's peace to anyone. The people we talk to might not look or sound as we expected. Everyone is a beloved child of God regardless of any feature that they possess.

### Spreading God's Peace

I wonder what it would be like if together Christians all believed that in Christ, we found peace. I wonder if every Christian understands that when Jesus looks at them, he forgives the past and longs to move forward together. Sometimes, someone must make their own path: Like the Marys we heard about in last week's scripture, they have to try and take action. Go to the tomb. Be active in fear and grief. With that action often comes the Gospel truth.

Sometimes, someone is frozen in fear, and it causes a lack of movement. Yet I wonder if we trust Jesus that there is always a direction. I wonder if as Christians we might find a new path that we never imagined. Jesus wants to bring us back to peace; I wonder if we are ready for what that looks like moving forward. I am excited to take the peaceful adventure forward together. Amen.

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<sup>6</sup> Lewis, K.M. (2014). *Fortress Biblical Preaching Commentary: John*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

<sup>7</sup> Wright, N.T. (2004). *John for Everyone*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press

<sup>8</sup> John 20:19