

Text: John 20:19-23 (Pew Bible, pg.1075)

Title: “Easter Peace”

INTRODUCTION

I invite you to take your Bibles, or the one in the pew rack in front of you, and open it to John 20. As you're turning let me ask you to take a look at the insert in your worship folder. On one side there's information about a new series of messages I'm starting next week on marriage entitled "Great Lovers of the Bible." Throughout the Bible we see marriages ... some of them are great, some of them struggled. And we can learn from all of them; that's what I hope will happen in this series of messages. Now turn the card over. To really give your marriage a boost we are offering the Travis Marriage Celebration, April 11-13, featuring author and speaker Gary Thomas. He is author of the best-seller *Sacred Marriage*, and for single adults, *Sacred Search*. You can see details in the worship folder about these events for married adults and single adults. I encourage you to go online and register.

John 20:19 - On the evening of that first day of the week...

Let me just remind you of what has happened leading up to this Sunday evening, the day that Jesus rose from the dead. Of course, Jesus was crucified on the Friday of that week. After Jesus died, some of His followers took His body, prepared it for burial and buried Him in a borrowed tomb made out of stone. A large stone was rolled over the entrance to the tomb.

On Easter Sunday morning the power of God exploded in that dark tomb resurrecting Jesus from the dead, Jesus walked out of the tomb alive. Very early that morning, just after sunrise, at least four women visited the tomb. They had come to anoint the body of Jesus, but they found that the stone had been rolled away from the opening of the grave. When they went inside they found that the body of Jesus wasn't there. They were met by two angels who reminded them that Jesus had predicted that He would be crucified and raised on the third day.

As the bewildered women ran from the tomb, Jesus Himself appeared to them on the way. He told them not to be afraid, but to go and tell the other disciples what had happened. They did what Jesus told them to do, but the other disciples couldn't believe it; they had to see it with their own eyes. Peter and John ran to the tomb. When they arrived they stooped down and looked inside the tomb to see that it was true.

Later on that Sunday, two discouraged disciples were traveling back to their home in Emmaus, talking about the discouraging events of the day, thinking Jesus was dead. But Jesus came and walked along the road with them for a while, then He revealed Himself to them.

And now it is the evening of the first Easter Sunday. Jesus had appeared to individuals, but now for the first time He appears to all the disciples together. **READ JOHN 20:19-23**

The Risen Lord Jesus Christ was real to those who first followed Him, and He is real to us today. Just as sure as those first disciples experienced the Risen Christ in a personal way, so you and I can

experience that same Jesus in a personal way. Notice how it happened for them, and how it can happen for us:

1. CHRIST STANDS IN OUR MIDST (John 20:19).

John 20:19 - On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them...

So Jesus comes right into the midst of their fearful gathering. He didn't stand outside and try to shout through the wall to them. He stood among them. I tell you Jesus comes near; He wants us to see Him and experience Him up close and personal. He's not a distant God. And I want you to know that and experience it today.

You see, Jesus can go places no one else can go. The door to the house where the disciples had huddled was locked up tight ... and Jesus walks right in. With His resurrection body Jesus can go where others can't go, and He can do what others can't do.

So here are the disciples locked behind closed doors. This is a perfect picture of so many people today ... locked behind the closed door of a secret past ... an overwhelming failure ... a terrible illness ... a devastating divorce ... financial ruin and so much more.

And Jesus walks in and stands right in the middle of it. One commentator writing about this said: "He can go where no counselor can go. He can go where no doctor can go. He can go where no lover can go. He can reach you, and reach into you, anywhere and any time. There is no place where you are, and no depths of personhood that you are which Jesus can't penetrate. Jesus' resurrection from the dead fits him to do what no one else can do. There is no one else like him in all the universe. He is alive, and he is the one and only God-Man. What he is capable of you cannot imagine."

So Jesus can walk into places in your life that others cannot go. You can know Him as real as you know anyone in your life. And I pray that will happen for you here in this place today.

He stands among us, but also...

2. CHRIST SPEAKS TO OUR FEARS AND DOUBTS (John 20:19).

And notice what He says...

John 20:19b - Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"

John 20:21a - Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you!"

It's more than just a typical greeting. It's a prayer and a promise straight from Jesus Christ. "Peace be with you! Peace be to you! Peace be for you!"

Now there's a reason that Jesus speaks peace to these people. It says that they were locked behind closed doors "for fear of the Jews..." This was very real distress and fear in their hearts. They were

afraid that what the Jewish authorities did to Jesus that resulted in His crucifixion they would do to them. So there was fear. But we also know there was confusion. Their whole world was turned upside down as the Lord Jesus apparently was dead. And, of course, there was grief. And Jesus came into that room filled with fear, confusion and grief ... and He speaks peace.

And Christ knows how we need peace in so many ways. We need...

- **PEACE WITH GOD**

Jesus comes and offers us peace with God because of what He had done on the Cross. Our sins have separated us from God. Because we sin, we are naturally enemies of God. But Jesus, when He died on the Cross died to pay the debt we owe because of our sin. And we can have peace with God because of that.

Romans 5:1 - Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

All the hostility between God and us because of our sin was absorbed on the cross. And this peace with God helps us make peace with our past. We no longer have to be paralyzed by the memories of all we have done against God. He can heal those memories and help us move on.

We also need...

- **THE PEACE OF GOD**

ILLUSTRATION – The opposite of peace is worry. And worry gets you nowhere. It is like rocking in a rocking chair. It gives you something to do ... it keeps you occupied, but it gets you nowhere. And the Bible teaches us about the peace of God.

Philippians 4:6 - Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

Philippians 4:7 - And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

ILLUSTRATION – This weekend I was speaking with one of our ladies who told me about the terrible week she had. She's been battling cancer and going through treatments. She spoke of lying on the table in the hospital for one of those treatments, and feeling fear as tears ran down her cheeks. But she kept turning to the Lord and claiming the promises of His Word. But she felt guilty that she was afraid. I reminded her that literally hundreds of times in the Bible you hear things like: Do not be afraid, do not fear, be courageous, take heart. God knows that fear is very real in our lives. And by claiming the promise of His presence with us we don't have to be paralyzed by fear. And this peace that Jesus speaks to the disciples is the opposite of the fear they were experiencing. It means "tranquility."

We need peace with God, the peace of God and we need ...

- **PEACE WITH OTHERS**

One of the great frustrations that many people face today is strife in relationships at home, at work, at school, even at church. How can we come to a place where we can be reconciled in those broken relationships? It's only through the power of the Cross of Jesus Christ. The love that God had for us that caused Him to send His own Son to die for us all is the love that can overcome any adversity in our relationships.

Romans 12:18 - If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

And when we have experienced peace with God, and the peace of God, then we can reach out and make peace with others.

Now this was "show and tell" for Jesus.

John 20:20 - After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

In case they were thinking, "This is a ghost. This can't be real." Jesus showed His hands and side ... the very real evidence of His sufferings for them. And the Bible says that they were "overjoyed." The fear gave way to joy. When Jesus showed up, peace showed up. Run from Jesus and there will be no peace with God, with others, with ourselves. Run to Him and find peace in every way.

So Jesus stands among us, speaks to us and then...

3. CHRIST SENDS US OUT WITH A PURPOSE (John 20:21).

John 20:21 - Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

You know, what is missing in the lives of many people is a sense of meaning and purpose ... a reason to get out of bed every morning and spend your day doing something with meaning and purpose. So many people I know are like these disciples ... locked behind a protective door that isolates them from the world, and isolates them from the needs of people and the mission God has for them.

Well, Jesus gives a mission to His followers. He sent His small band of disciples into the world with His message of hope and forgiveness ... the Gospel. And Jesus sends you and me with that same mission.

You find real life by releasing your life to the purpose of Jesus Christ. Jesus said...

Luke 9:23-24 - "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.

Peace is not just for us to sit and soak. It is for us to stand and serve.

And then notice also that...

4. CHRIST SUSTAINS US BY HIS SPIRIT (John 20:22).

John 20:22 - And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.

Now why did Jesus do that? It is because He knew that what He was asking His disciples to be and do, they could not be and do on their own. And so Jesus supports, sustains and strengthens us by His Holy Spirit.

There was Peter who had denied the Lord three times. But he heard it like everyone else ... “as the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” BLOW WITH CUPPED HANDS ... “receive the Holy Spirit.” There were James and John who fell asleep in the prayer meeting with Jesus. Remember that? They were in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus asked them to pray with Him, and they couldn’t even stay awake. BLOW WITH CUPPED HANDS ... “receive the Holy Spirit.” Most of the disciples lost their faith and abandoned Jesus in the last hours. But Jesus comes to them and says, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

Now you need to know that this is just a provisional imparting of the Holy Spirit for the things they would have to do over the next days and weeks. But seven weeks later came Pentecost when the Bible says that the Holy Spirit came to dwell in each of them. And since Pentecost, the Holy Spirit comes to live within those who trust in Jesus for the gift of eternal life. Christ comes to live in us by His Spirit. And when He does He brings the power we need to be and do all that we are to be and do.

Acts 1:8 - But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses...

ILLUSTRATION – This happens to you all the time. You’re sitting in a coffee shop doing something on your smart phone or your lap top, and your battery goes dead. You’re sitting in a place with walls, and inside those walls are yards and yards of electrical wire. And running through that electrical wire is the electricity you need for your phone or your computer. It’s possible for all that power surround us, but for us not to be connected to it. The only way you can connect with that power is to take action. You take your phone or your laptop over to that wall outlet and you plug it in.

That’s what Jesus means when He said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” It is available, but you have to receive it by faith. And that is available to you today for the very first time when you take the step of faith and receive Christ.

John 1:12 - Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—

Something amazing happened after the resurrection. Just a few weeks later, those same disciples who were cowering behind closed doors because of fear, suddenly exploded into the streets of their city with a courageous witness. What made the difference? What caused that kind of transformation? It was the very personal realization that Jesus was, indeed, alive.

And the last thing Jesus says to them is...

John 20:23 - If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

Now this may seem a little confusing. But here's what it means: He told His followers that as they go about telling people what Jesus did ... how He died to make forgiveness possible ... when people believe that truth they can experience forgiveness.

When we put our trust in Jesus Christ we are forgiven our sins ... and we then can forgive others who have sinned against us.

ILLUSTRATION – Last week there was a terrible shoot out just north of us in the town of Decatur. Police tried to pull over a car driven by Evan Ebel, but Ebel began shooting at the police and eventually, after a high speed chase, Ebel was killed. Later the authorities connected Evan Ebel to the assassination of Tom Clements in Colorado. Clements was the director of the prison system in Colorado. Last Monday the funeral for Tom Clements was held at a church in Colorado Springs. The widow, Lisa Clements, stood before the crowd with her two daughters next to her. This is what she said: "We want everyone who hears Tom's story to know that he lived his life believing in redemption, in the ability of the human heart to be changed. He would want justice certainly but moreover he'd want forgiveness. Our family prays for the family of the man who took Tom's life and we will pray for forgiveness in our own hearts and our own peace," she said.

I don't know Lisa Clements, but I know that the forgiveness and peace that she is praying for is found in Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION

Another way to look at this is that Jesus gave His followers three things:

- Peace – the opposite of fear, worry, anxiety and conflict
- Power – the opposite of weakness
- Purpose – the opposite of drifting with no direction in life