

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

Breathing Out Peace

Gospel Lesson

John 20:19-23 (NRSV)

¹⁹When 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." ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." ²²When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

Bible/Sermon Focus

This is our second week in the sermon series, *Encountering Christ: The Post-Resurrection Appearances of Jesus*. In this series we have been considering the task of evangelism and how to introduce the *Risen Lord & Savior* to others, by looking at how the *Risen Lord & Savior* introduced himself in the post-resurrection accounts found in the Gospel.

This week's scripture is the beginning of a story where Jesus appears to the disciples in a room behind locked doors. It's also known as the story of "Doubting Thomas." The story begins on the evening of the first Easter Sunday. Jesus appears to the disciples, but Thomas is not with them. Thomas tells the disciples that "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." Jesus then reappears in the same place, one week later, and Thomas sees the open wounds in Jesus' hands.

In this encounter we see Jesus meeting his friends by first assuring them that they don't need to be afraid. How many times has fear been used by people of faith to try to convince someone that they should know Jesus, or that they should come to church? These disciples had real reasons to be afraid. They were hiding from authorities who they believed were ready to crucify them. When someone is frightened, and worried that they may be condemned, they do not need anyone piling on even more fear. What Jesus offers instead...is peace. Jesus offers peace. Peace is something we could all use a little more of these days.

And when the risen Jesus introduces himself to others, he doesn't do it in some brand new, perfect body. He does so in the same body that has been through crucifixion. Jesus comes with his wounds and scars. We do not need to present to the world a "holier than thou" type of presence. All we need to do is offer the presence of peace, just as we are, meeting people, just as they are.

Jesus reappears to the disciples a week later to meet Thomas, another beautiful occurrence. Sometimes, we may not be in the place to meet the Risen Christ. And that's okay. We do not need to force the Risen Christ's presence onto folk who are not ready for it. Thomas knew his

boundaries and named them. And you know what? Jesus met him there, within those expectations.

Everyday we have to opportunity to offer a peaceful presence to others. We can sit or stand in solidarity with those who are afraid, persecuted, suffering, or in hiding. And when we show up for others, the Holy Spirit will do its work of creating a community of trust. She will breathe the presence of God into the space in which those relationships abide, and she will make known the powerful, peaceful presence of God.

Discussion Questions

1. How can being present with someone be an act of evangelism?
2. Share a time someone has been a peaceful presence for you in your life?
3. Have you ever been in a place where you were not ready to meet the Risen Christ?
4. Have you ever met a Christian who seemed "holier than thou?" AND – Have you ever been that Christian who was maybe a bit "holier than thou?"
5. Has fear ever been a motivator in your faith? Did it work?

Prayer

Risen Savior, you whose presence is always peace, you who meet us within our fear and remain by our side through it all, hear our prayer. May we, as your disciples, be an authentic, peaceful presence in the lives of our neighbors. Allow our presence to reveal your presence, so that our neighbors see you through us. Amen.

Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."