

Scripture Readings and Sermon

April 11, 2021 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on John 20:19-31 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

The Gospel of John, written some sixty years after the resurrection, was aimed at an audience who were beginning to realize that the second coming may not happen as soon as they originally believed. It is this doubt that is reflected not only in Thomas but in all the disciples. Even after the women had proclaimed Jesus' resurrection and, according to Luke, two of their own had encountered Jesus on the road, the disciples were "locked" in a room because of fear. When Jesus comes the first time, he doesn't just say "Peace be with you" once but twice. Jesus, "a week later", finds the disciples still behind the same shut doors and for a third time has to tell them "Peace". Thomas who missed the first time is just as doubtful as the other disciples had been and simply requested the same proof. For John, Thomas represents the new generation of believers who were demanding the second coming in order to affirm their faith. To these believers, Jesus says, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." This becomes the creed of faith for the young church who was beginning to realize that it may be a while before Jesus returned.

John 20:26 Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."

When has fear closed your doors? Physically, mentally, emotionally?

What helped you open those doors?

Have you felt God's peace empower you to unlock the doors?

Do others need to find that same peace in their lives?

Do you view offering Jesus as offering peace to a frightened world?

Commentary on 1 John 1:1-2:2 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

The letters of John were written around 100 A.D., over sixty-five years since the resurrection. Unlike the letters of Paul, who traveled from place to place, the letters of John were written to a local community. After years of waiting for the second coming of Jesus, the community of John began to slowly break apart. This division created anger and bitterness within the community. In typical John fashion, the image of darkness is used to describe this division. In this context, sin does not deal specifically with the community's relationship with God but rather the relationship with the Body of Christ represented by the community. John pleads with those who have strayed from the community to come back to the light. John reminds the faithful that all have sinned and that through Jesus Christ everyone who confesses can rejoin the community. Later John will remind the community that it is love and not the promise of a second coming that binds a community together.

1 John 1:8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

Didn't Jesus die once for sin? Then why do we still sin?

Do we confuse the addiction of sin with the temptation to sin?

Are you free from the addiction, the compulsion to sin?

Even free from the compulsion, does the temptation ever leave you?

Which is worse: the temptation or denying that we are tempted?

Commentary on Acts 4:32-35 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

Just as Jesus was the new Passover, the early community embodied a new Exodus from the captivity of sin. In a mirror image of the three thousand that died because of the golden calf during the first Exodus, three thousand were saved when Peter preached at Pentecost. Similar to the Jews in the

desert, the new community found itself in a hostile environment with people gathered from all walks of life dependent upon one another for survival. By selling their possessions and equally supporting one another, they were living out the "Year of Jubilee" from the Law. This communal life was based on the assumption that Jesus would return soon. Like the Israelites who wandered in the desert, the early community would soon learn that they were in for a much longer journey. While liquidating their assets proved challenging for the early church, it would become vital to its survival in Jerusalem when they were forced to flee with the Roman invasion and destruction of the temple during the Jewish revolt from 66-70 A.D.

Acts 4:32 Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul

Have you ever been part of a group with "one heart and soul"?

What does it feel like to be in a divided group?

Even if projects get done, is there something missing when the group is divided?

What is more important: divided group with lots of projects or united group with one project?

Can the same be said about a church?

Can a divided church truly be the Body of Christ?

Sermon "Leave the Dark" (*Sermon Video*)

The disciples were both literally and figuratively behind shut doors when Jesus encountered them after his resurrection. Unlike the women who went seeking Jesus, the disciples hid in fear and doubt. After the crucifixion, they knew they were no longer safe in Jerusalem but feared that if they went out into the streets that they might be arrested. Rather than giving them comfort, the words of the women concerning the resurrection only increased their doubts and fears. The missing body would be blamed on them for how could a dead body simply get up and leave on its own? Thomas simply expressed what they all felt. The doors to their hearts and minds as well as the door to the room was shut. In the midst of this fear and doubt, Jesus spoke a word of peace.

As in the time of creation when God blew across the waters of chaos, Jesus blew the Holy Spirit of peace upon the disciples. Peace, it is really Jesus for he is risen. Peace, let go of the doubts of your mind and believe. Peace, have faith and let the fear of your heart vanish. This is the peace that Jesus offered his disciples then and now. God's prevenient grace finds us in all our hiding places and speaks to us the words of peace. "Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast." (Psalm 139:7-10) God's love calls us to grasp His grace and leave our hiding places. The door is open. The stone is rolled away. It is time to enter the light.

Psalm 139 continues, "If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night,' even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you." Through the power of the resurrection, God's justifying grace leads us from the darkness and into the light. John, in his letter, says that we are no longer captive of sin for in Jesus Christ we have salvation. That does not mean that we still have times when we want to hide in the darkness for the harsh light of truth can be overwhelming but Jesus will help us even then if we ask. To say that we are not tempted is to say we have no sin. It is only when we admit the pull of sin in our lives and ask for help that we find Jesus waiting to lift us up. Although the path is straight, we rarely walk in a straight line but Jesus is always there to offer justifying grace to bring us back on the path.

When we are on the path walking together with Jesus, we soon discover that we are not alone. There are others who are filled with the Holy Spirit and walking on that same path with Jesus. It is in those precious moments that we are in fellowship not only with God but with our fellow Christian. We are of one heart and one soul focused on God in Christ Jesus. God's sanctifying grace enables us to let go of our self-centeredness and share all things for a common good. It is not easy to fully let go of the

ego as anyone who has been married can attest. There are times when the I wants attention even if there is "no I in team". This is why communism this side of the kingdom of heaven is a false dream. But for one moment, when the Holy Spirit bound everyone on the same path with Jesus, the kingdom of God could be seen on earth. The more we live into the light and leave our hiding places behind, the more we may see glimpses of that kingdom in our lives.