

Acts 4:32-35; 1 John 1:1-2:2 April 11, 2021

John 20:19-31

The Risen One Meets Us

Did you realize that one quarter of Matthew's entire gospel is devoted to the events from Palm Sunday through Jesus' burial on Good Friday evening? About a third of Mark's gospel and 40% of John's gospel are dedicated to that week! Luke only devotes 18% to Jesus' final week, but that's still a lot. Holy Week is central to the story of Jesus' passion and death, and the gospels devote a great deal of attention to the week before Easter. Then we reach Easter Sunday and celebrate! But what about all the days following Easter Sunday? After our celebration and commemorations is it simply back to the same old same old? We know all about the week before Jesus' death [Holy Week]; but what do we know about the week after his resurrection? And how does that impact our lives?

I should think we would have a particular interest in that less-heralded week; after all, this is where we live. Not only is today the Sunday after Easter, but every day of our lives is lived during the time after Easter.

The second week of Easter is really a continuation of the story of Jesus' resurrection and his appearance to his followers. Let's step back a week for a moment ... You recall, it was Sunday evening, the first day of the new week; it was Easter night in fact, but the disciples still didn't fully realize what that meant. All they knew was that they had found His tomb empty. Mary Magdala said she was sure she had met the Lord, but they weren't sure ... not at all. They huddled together behind locked doors and closed windows, afraid. . . fearful of what lay ahead, anxious about the future. And who among us hasn't been there?

Fear Paralyzes

Who hasn't been afraid at some time, or anxious about the future? The story is told of three wise men who set out on a journey, for even though they were considered wise in their own country, they were humble enough to hope that travel would broaden their minds.

They had barely crossed into a neighboring country when they saw a skyscraper in the distance. "What could this enormous object be?" they asked themselves. The obvious procedure would have been to go up and find out. But no--that might be too dangerous. Suppose it was something that exploded as one approached? It was altogether wiser to decide what it was before finding out. Various theories were put forward, examined and, on the basis of their past experiences, rejected. Finally, it was determined, also on the basis of past experience, of which they had an abundant supply, that the object in question, whatever it was, could only have been placed there by giants.

This led them to the conclusion that it would be safer to avoid this country altogether. So, they went back home, having added something to their fund of experience.¹

Do you know anyone who is often like those wise men? Based on their experience, or their attitude and outlook on life, they simply add more fear with each new experience, which keeps them in a rut or causes them to shrink backward. Fear can paralyze or cause us to do terrible things. **It was fear that crucified Jesus and fear that tried to keep him in a tomb.** What is it about Him that causes such fear? Could it be that He embodies the life that lives to God, rather than a life living by the world's fallen standards? Could it be that His life, a life that breaks the bonds of death, challenges the power of oligarchs and ordinary people alike? It is fear that keeps people paralyzed, controlled, afraid to step out ... and too many politicians these days like it that way. They see their power increasing when people are kept in fear. And **Satan** likes it that way too ... He **doesn't want us empowered with a new life in Christ.**

Many a Christian congregation faces an uncertain future. Year-long closures, on top of diminishing attendance, and a growing skepticism or hostility in the culture has instilled fear in church members and leaders about the viability of their fellowship in coming years. Fear keeps them from boldly engaging in outreach to help the downtrodden and to share faith in Christ.

Behind Closed Doors

They huddled together behind locked doors and closed windows, afraid. . . And that's where the Risen Christ met those first disciple, and still meets disciples today: behind closed doors. **Christ meets us in deeply personal ways,** in the private arenas of our lives, behind closed doors, **where we try to hide our fears.** There are some things we must do alone - like being born or dying - no one can do these things for us. In the same way no one can believe for you; no one can meet Christ for you. The Risen One meets each person, behind the closed doors of their lives.

Jesus entered that room of fearful disciples and said, "Peace be with you." Now, this is no casual greeting, even if it sounds so. **"Peace be with you" ... the very same words that the angels spoke to the shepherds at Jesus' birth.** What this greeting says is that though awesome, unexpected, and maybe over-powering, they have nothing to fear from this divine presence they are witnessing. Christ rising from death would be astounding to the disciples, and could be a fearful thing to witness given the week they'd just been through. Is His resurrection astounding, and maybe a little frightening, to you? Jesus offers them peace ... the gift of peace as He had promised them before He was crucified.

Remember? When the disciples were fearful at the Last Supper Jesus had assured them that His parting gift of peace would be lasting, for it is related to His return. He had told his disciples, ***Peace I give to you, but not as the world gives,*** **Jn.14:27-28.** Now, with His return He breathes on them the Holy Spirit ... the Holy Spirit is the enduring presence of Jesus. Christian peace, friends, is the steadfast love of God as experienced through Jesus Christ. **Today, in the days after Easter, Jesus says "peace be with you..."** He says it to you. In Him you will find peace in all the fears and little deaths you experience, all the things that leave emotional and spiritual scars and even Death with a capital "D" that awaits us in the grave ... all of that is defeated by Christ's resurrection. His resurrection soundly defeats the

inevitability of death. It's all because ***There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, 1 John 4:18.*** Jesus, our risen Savior, is perfect love and He continues to breathe the Holy Spirit into the lives of those who receive Him. Take courage in Him!

Beyond Closed Doors

Just about every morning there is an anonymous package left on our doorsteps that we nearly trip over going out the door. The package is fear, full of "watch out, you'll fail, it won't work, they're against you, it won't be enough, you'll never get it, etc." Each day we face the challenge of our fears and we can give in or ask for help. I once saw a plaque which read, **"Fear knocked at the door. Faith in God answered. No one was there."** With the Risen Christ among us we can unbolt the doors without fear.

When Jesus appeared in that locked room full of fearful disciples back then, he breathed on them; breathed on them in the same manner God had breathed life into the first humans described in Genesis. **Jesus breathed new life, resurrected life into his disciples, making them, and us, new creations, consecrated and sent out.** Let's not be afraid to move from behind closed doors. We can't shrink back in fear and only dabble with the Christian life. It's too important for that. We cannot let non-believers define the parameters of our faith.

But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, 1 Peter 3:15.

We are fast losing the prop of a culture and society that supports the values and attitudes that flow from a life in Christ. We are on our own as educational institutions, media, and even governments pressure Christians to stay behind closed doors, to keep the message of resurrection out of the public square. Why? Fear, once again, fear of losing power over the lives of people free in Christ.

Each of us has our own fears that confront us and sometimes mock us. Fear keeps creeping in as we realize what social disruption and manipulation is taking place in the nation. Nevertheless, I **rejoice that we serve a living Savior who imbues us with His perfect love,** the love of our heavenly Father, the love that casts out all fear. ***Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 1 Peter 1:3.*** Fear not to show the world the hope we have in Him and invite others into His living hope.

We wax sentimental around Christmas and ask how can we keep the Christmas spirit all year round? It's much more important that the music and message of Easter be heard year-round. Christ is alive!

Christ has risen! He is risen indeed! He is with us, giving us power to live a resurrected life and proclaim his peace wherever we are. We need not fear going out in His name ... He said, ***Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you, Jn. 20:21.***

His perfect love casts out your fear. Step out ... into a life of living hope.

¹Anthony de Mello, TAKING FLIGHT (New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Pub. Grp., Inc., 1990), 39-40.