**Peace Be With You**

So we join the disciples this morning in a locked room - they’re scared. Jesus has been killed by the Jewish leaders and even though Mary says that he has appeared to her risen, and Peter and John say that the tomb is inexplicably empty, it’s no wonder they’re in a locked room. Scared, traumatised, probably wondering what the next few minutes and hours are going to look like, let alone the next few days, weeks and months.

Some of you might never have experienced a loss so crushing that it puts you right out of orientation, but I bet some of you have. You thought you knew what life was going to look like and then either all of a sudden or over a period of months or years, the dream died. I hope for you that life with and in Jesus has brought about new, resurrection dreams instead, but for today, let’s put ourselves in the shoes of the disciples. Many of them have given everything to follow Jesus. Many of them have left family, livelihood and security behind to put their trust in him and follow wherever he leads. And now their hope for a future is *probably* over, *probably* crushed, *probably* never to return.

Let’s be human about this - I’m not sure they knew what to do next, any more than any of us, if we’re honest about it, would know what to do next in their shoes.

And then Jesus appears in front of them. John the writer of the gospel - is very matter-of-fact about it. Jesus appeared. And says ‘peace be with you’. I wonder if each of them thought only they could see him, thought they were all going mad, but no, he shows them his hands and sides. It really is Him! Jesus really is amongst them. And what is the very first thing he says? ‘Peace be with you’. I think for two reasons:

1. They were probably terrified. I would have been.
2. The greatest gift at that moment that he could have given to them is his peace.

God is always giving us gifts. Sometimes we notice and are thankful. Sometimes not,

**11**If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! **12**So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets - Matthew 7:11-12.

If you have the peace of Christ and you allow it to do what it wants to do, which is to rule in your hearts (Coloissians 3:15) and then you take the next step of being thankful and letting the word of Christ dwell in you richly - with real depth so that it is as if it becomes part of you - then you can face anything.

Jesus repeats his offer of peace to the disciples, because they needed to hear it twice, I suspect.

But also to emphasise that they would have comfort, power and strength as they were sent ‘as the Father has sent me’. What did the Father send Jesus to do?

* Proclaim that the kingdom of heaven was near and to remind people to turn from sin and to turn to God.
* To radically show that everyone was loved, precious to God.
* To heal, release, restore, to raise the dead, cast out demons
* To bring about justice in places where there was no justice
* To be available to God and to do what He saw the Father doing
* To suffer and to die

So what are we sent to do? Something along those lines I would suggest. We receive the Holy Spirit because we need God with us in us and through us to enable us to do what we are invited to do by God. If it was just me and my strength, my brain, my sense of humour, I’d absolutely only get so far. With God with, in and through me, the kingdom can come. ‘My old self has been crucified with Christ.e It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not treat the grace of God as meaningless. For if keeping the law could make us right with God, then there was no need for Christ to die.’ (Galatians 2:20-21). According to the law of the OT we are all bang to rights. By Jesus’s law of love, we are forgiven and freed for joyful obedience. But it’s not just obedience to the law of love that we are freed for. It’s obedience to the outcomes of a life lived by the law of love that we are freed for too.

Jesus says here that if we forgive anyone’s sins, they are forgiven. What power to have! What a glorious gift you can give to someone to forgive them for a wrong they have done, to you or to themselves. We are forgiven so that we can have the chance to forgive ourselves and forgive others. No one is going to force you to do it, but if you have Christ you have more chance of being able to do it than you have ever had before.

Here’s a question to ponder: when you pray, what do you think happens?

Lots of things, no doubt. For me, if we consider ourselves friends of God and brothers and sisters of Jesus - both things we are if we do the things that Jesus invited his followers to do and if we trust His Father as he told his followers to do - then the character of prayer changes a lot. God wants to give us what we ask for, especially if it helps the family to grow and for it to keep operating the family business as it has always been meant to.

The family business of the family of God is to trust, to obey and to love. If we do these things I am completely convinced that alongside the everyday acts of love, kindness and mercy which are the core stock in trade of the Christian, we will see miracles, signs and wonders, people turning to God for forgiveness, grace and a place to call home in the storms of life. Love for God, for others and for ourselves is the core of what it means to be a Christian. When Jesus breathed on the disciples and said ‘receive the Holy Spirit’ he was setting the tone for Pentecost and all that came after that.

For me though, the key message this morning is that when he breathed on his disciples, Jesus gave them a great and powerful gift, a gift that he trusted them to use for the good of others and for the glory of God. I believe it is the same for us today.

We live in times when it would be easy, understandable even, to be a little bit like the disciples and stay inside a locked room. Fear could get the best of us all-too-easily.

Jesus reached the disciples when they were locked away in fear, offered them his peace, sent them out filled with the Holy Spirit and empowered them to live the kingdom building life following in his footsteps. I think he does the same for us today, too, or at least he will do, if we ask, seek and knock in prayer.

Amen