

Remember
First Sunday after Easter
Jesus came and stood among them... John 20:19
April 11, 2021
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Prayer: Dear God, may we always remember the love poured out in Jesus. May we have the insight to reimagine just how powerful and healing that love is. May we have the courage to rebuild your church on the cornerstone of that love.

Message

The composer writes the music, but the performers implement the notes and rhythm, to make the magic of music happen. The clockmaker designs and builds the clock; but the owner has to set it to the right time and keep it wound up for it to do what it was made to do. The coach organizes the offense and defensive plays, but the athletes have to make it happen if there is to be a game. The teacher plans the lessons and gives the information; but the students have to apply the knowledge in order to grow in wisdom and understanding. The artist creates and expresses through a particular medium, but without someone to look at and appreciate the skill, color, texture, composition, or design, can it be a masterpiece?

One must have the other for either to make a difference or be of significant value. One must have the other in order for either to have or live into its purpose; to do what it was made for or to be who they were created to be. There is all the difference in the world between something being achieved and something being implemented.

A week ago, Jesus achieved his purpose - he did what he set out to do. He defeated death and began the work of new creation. We remembered and celebrated. All that he taught, stood for, revealed, upheld, lived and died for must now be implemented.

There was and maybe still is however, a problem. The disciples are hiding! It may not feel like it, but it was just a week ago we remembered what it must have been like for those first followers of Jesus. What they went through that last week of Jesus' life on earth.

They had witnessed Jesus be arrested, convicted, flogged, killed, and put in a stone grave. They knew the bitterness of the religious leaders and pharisees who had been a part of the death of Jesus and they were afraid that their turn would come next. So they met in fear - in terror even, listening for every step on the stairs and every knock at the door, lest the representatives of the Sanhedrin should come to arrest them too.

They spent three days scattered, avoiding crowds, and trying to make it back to the last safe place they knew - the room where they last gathered with Jesus for a meal and his incredible act of humility and servant leadership. Jesus surprised them then and he was about to do it again.

Read text: John 20:19-23

When 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."

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

It is probably because I just finished watching it, but this scene with the disciples reminds me of the HBO series, Band of Brothers. If you've not watched it, it is a 10 episode mini-series on WWII told through the stories, memories, and lives of the men who were there. In one episode, the "easy company" found themselves without an effective leader. The men in the company began to question what was happening, where they were going, what the plan was, and who was in charge. Beneath the questions was fear - who had their back, who was looking out for them, who would guide them through the next leg of the assignment, who would keep them safe. They began to come apart around the edges and question everything.

I hear that in the text we read today. Even though we know the rest of the story - we know how Easter turns out, those first followers didn't. There they were locked in the last safe place they knew. They were waiting. Questioning. Second guessing. Perhaps even blaming. Certainly coming apart at the edges a bit. In the midst of that, Jesus shows up and does two things that change the direction of believers and the church forever.

He comes to them where they are; in their fear and bewilderment, and what is the first thing he says to them? “Peace be to you - Peace be with you.” This was a normal everyday eastern greeting but it means far more than a general, hey good to see you. I was just in the neighborhood and thought I would stop by and I wish you well. It means: “May God give you every good thing.”

In other words, I am here like I said I would be. I am blessing you and asking God to protect you not only from harm but to bring you what is good, beautiful, and true. I got you. I am with you.

Then Jesus commissions his followers with what one scholar calls “the Charter of the church.” Jesus says, “As God has sent me, so I send you.” With that he breathed on them and said, “receive the Holy Spirit.”

Ok, can we just stop and take that in? (pause)

Jesus says, “As God, the almighty creator of all; powerful and all encompassing God, sent me, so I, Jesus, redeemer, savior to all, miracle maker, healer, voice for the marginalized, I send you - a hodge-podge of scared, uncertain, and bewildered followers who say they believe and trust in me.” If that weren’t enough, “here,” Jesus says, (enact breathing upon something) - “receive the holy spirit - the power source, the advocate, the driving force that holds it all together, take it with you.”

The magnitude of that moment is almost surreal. The intensity, mystery, and power of that moment is amazing to me. The beauty and raw emotion of that moment takes my breath away.

It is as if Jesus is saying, my purpose began with me and my life, but can only continue with you so here, take the power, truth, wisdom, example, and presence of all that I am and take it with you. Remember it all. Remember all that you saw, heard, experienced, did, witnessed, took part in. Remember the faces of those you saw come to me. The sound of those who found their voice again because of what I taught. The touch of their hugs, handshakes, kisses as they were given hope again. Remember what I said, how I said it, and to whom I said it. Remember what I stand for, what I called you to stand for. Remember it all - when you are afraid. When you fail. When you succeed. When you get hurt. When they don't listen. When you lose your way. When you rise and when you fall. When you get frustrated and when you weep with gratitude and humility. Remember.

This moment between Jesus and the disciples is their personal pentecost moment - powerful and empowering. The risen Christ comes to them in their most vulnerable moment and speaks to them words of comfort, assurance, and challenge.

Easter was but a week ago. We spent 40 days getting there. We spent a week walking the emotional roller-coaster with Jesus to the cross. Why would we be so quick to move on? To allow it to be swallowed up in

the routine of daily life or to act like it is not a part of our reality. We are on this side of Easter therefore we are an Easter people. It is our reality.

Jesus comes to all of us in our upper rooms - those metaphorical places we go when we are hurting, confused, angry, questioning, and second guessing, and he says to us, peace be with you; I am here. I am your reality.

As pastor Andy mentioned last week, this is just the beginning. Now is the time we must remember, reimagine, and rebuild. Like the composer, the clockmaker, coach, artist, and teacher, everything Jesus was and is can only be if those who claim to believe in him, implement, enact, carry out, continue, and do what he started that first Easter morning - the creation of a New Kingdom - God's Kingdom.

For the next three weeks we want to explore what that means for you and for Grace Church. What does it mean, really, to remember all that Jesus taught? What is the point if we don't live it out in authentic and meaningful ways. What does it mean to reimagine church and community in light of following the risen Jesus? What difference would it make in the life of this church, this community? What would that reimagining look like? How can we rebuild following the kind of year and half we have had? What needs to be rebuilt? What does building on the cornerstone of Jesus bring about for us and for others that is good, beautiful, and true for all God's people?

These are the questions (or some variation thereof) that the first followers faced. These are the questions that awaited them on the other side of the upper room door following Jesus' resurrection. Like us after the year we have had; they were cautious and overwhelmed, AND like us, they were empowered by Jesus to open the door and greet the anxious, hurting, fractured, imperfect, and waiting world with a message of love. A message of hope.

Are you ready Easter people? Can we see Jesus in the room with us and remember? Will we creatively reimagine and with wisdom, courageously rebuild? I pray the breath of the risen Christ makes it so.

Amen.