

FAITH
IN THE FACE OF
FEAR

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Easter (redux)

*Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.
(Jn. 20:21)*

Happy Easter!

That might seem like a strange greeting since the Easter weekend was almost a month ago. Most of us probably polished off the last of the cream eggs before the end of April. However, in many church traditions, Resurrection Sunday is just the start of the Season of Easter, which lasts for fifty days and ends with the celebration of Pentecost (when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the church). By this calculation, we're smack-dab in the middle of Easter.

So eat some chocolate with impunity.

In an important way, it is always Easter, because Jesus is still risen from the dead! Something shifted in the cosmos when he walked out of the tomb, and things will never be the same. Life overcame death, light dispelled the darkness, and love won the day.

Easter is the ongoing reality we live within, whether we realize it or not.

The fact is, we often forget this. We live fearful and fretful, worried about the future and deaf to Jesus' promise that *"I will be with you always, even to the end of the age"* (Mt. 28:20). The good news is that he doesn't leave us to figure everything out on our own.

Instead, the risen Lord comes to us in much the same way he came to his disciples on the evening of that first Easter. Jn. 20:19 tells us that *"the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews."* They had been hiding out in this way since Jesus' crucifixion, sealing themselves off from the world. Even after the reports on Sunday morning about an empty tomb and angel messengers they remained locked inside, confused and afraid.

But Jesus breaks through.

Suddenly and inexplicably, Jesus is there with them. And he brings with him three things they desperately need. These are the same things he offers us today - peace, purpose and power.

Peace

"Peace be with you" are his very first words to them (v. 19). At one level, this was a conventional greeting in the Jewish world, but, on Jesus' lips, it is also much more.

It is the fulfillment of his promise to his disciples that *"in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world"* (16:33). Jesus offers peace to his followers, whatever trouble they may encounter in a broken world. This is as true today as it was back then. Covid-19 has left many of us feeling afraid and alone, unsure of what the future may hold. But Jesus won't be thwarted by a pandemic. He comes to us with words of hope: *"Peace be with you."* He is with you, and he is enough.

Purpose

"As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (v. 21) he says, calling his disciples to continue the work he had begun. Jesus does not envision his followers remaining on lock-down; he sees them bringing light and life to a world that needs it.

That call is the same today, even in the midst of physical distancing and social restrictions. We may feel like there isn't much that we can do, but God's strength has always been made perfect in weakness. He loves to use small things in big ways! So make a phone call, bake some buns for a neighbor, let someone know you are praying for them. You have a part to play in God's continuing story!

Power

And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (v. 22). Jesus not only invites us into his work; he gives us his Holy Spirit to empower that work. This is good news because, otherwise, we may feel intimidated or overwhelmed by the tasks laid before us. No need for that - as we noted in Thursday's devotional, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is now at work in us and through us (Eph. 1:19-20)! You can step out boldly, knowing that he will give you what you need, when you need it.

Let me say it again - Happy Easter!

Jesus is (still) risen, and he is still breaking through to his fearful followers with unimaginably good gifts:

*He comes to you with peace - so do not be afraid or anxious
He comes to you with purpose - so look for the opportunities he is opening up
He comes to you with power - so step forward with confidence*

And while you're at it, enjoy another cream egg.

Further Reading:

John 20:19-31

Key Verse:

Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you. (v. 21)

Calibrating Prayer:

Jesus, I am so glad that Easter is not just a day but a new reality - my new reality! I confess that I sometimes lose sight of this and get locked up in fear and confusion. Thank you for breaking through all of that with your offer of peace, your invitation into purpose, and your provision of power. Help me to live in the light of the risen Son today.