

April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2018

Scripture:

Isaiah 41:10

Isaiah 44:1-5

John 20:19-31

“How deep the Father’s love for us.”

I’ve often wondered how the disciples must have felt all huddled together behind locked doors in John’s Gospel today?

Clearly ---- among other things they were fearful --- “...The disciples were together with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders...”

But maybe they were also discouraged.

And maybe they were tired.

Uncertain.

Doubtful --- or at least questioning.

Perhaps they felt lost --- or abandoned.

Who knows the myriad of emotions they may have been feeling that day.

Jesus had been killed --- His body went missing ---- and then wait --- no it wasn’t missing He was alive again ---- but where was He now ----- when would He come and address His most intimate followers ----- what would He say to them?

Would He be upset with them?

I can well imagine them thinking ----- “How will He look ---- what kind of state will He be in ----- will He need medical attention ----- will He be hungry --- what will He need from us --- He has after all just gone through something --- well something no one else has ever gone through ---- I wonder what’s next for Him --- for us --- for the leaders that killed Him ----- for the whole world? ----- you can imagine the tension and the excitement ---- and the build up of emotions and questions and concerns.

“On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

Again ----- Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

We don't know much about what they doing that night ----- why exactly had they gathered --- what were they planning on doing? --- who knows.

But we do know that they were fearful --- and so they locked the doors.

And we do know that despite the doors being locked ----- Jesus came and stood among them ---- and offered them the peace they so desperately longed for.

God knew they needed comfort ---- and so He came and stood among them - -- reassuring them --- comforting them ---- and ultimately equipping and commissioning them.

God's deep and profound love for them showed up when they need it most.

And it didn't show up in some kind of an impersonal way --- once or twice removed --- it showed up in a person --- their leader was back ---- not even death itself could keep God --- Jesus ---- from being with them once again.

God wasn't playing around here in John's Gospel today.

Jesus showed up and the Holy Spirit showed up.

Jesus showed up and He breathed the very Spirit of God into His followers.

Easter --- and remember Easter is a season and not just a day ---- Easter is all about God pulling all the stops out --- holding nothing back.

God's love for us is so deep and so powerful and so true and so beautiful ---- that even when we gather together behind locked doors in fear ----- He is there.

Even ---- especially ---- when we're uncertain --- God comes to us and He reassures us and He offers us His presence in a special and in a powerful way.

And of course as John reminds us today the presence of the Lord is transforming.

And the love of God is transforming.

How many of us --- like the disciples today in John's Gospel --- have ever sat in a room --- either alone ---- or in a room full of other people ---- and felt all alone?

How many of us have had doubts and fears --- and anxiety?

How many of us have been unsure --- uncertain ----- felt lost --- or abandoned?

How many of us have questioned ---- and questioned ---- and questioned?

Thinking things like ---- "How?" --- "Why?" ----- "What's next?" ---- "I just don't understand ---- I don't like feeling this way ---- why is this happening to me ---- or to us?" -----and so on.

We've all felt a version of what the disciples were feeling in John's Gospel today.

I know I have --- and I'm sure I will again.

A heavy heart --- uncertainty ----- questions ----- discomfort ---- perhaps even a little fear like they did.

And along comes Jesus ---- quiet ---- humble --- intimate --- and personal.

What happened in John's Gospel today is that abundant life entered the room.

Abundant life entered the room.

Imagine Jesus has just been killed ---- it's only 3 days later --- it's dark ---- and remember for John darkness isn't just about lack of light --- for John darkness is a spiritual state as well ---- it's dark --- Jesus has been killed ---- His disciples fear they too will be killed for following Him --- and so they gather together and lock all the doors.

Some have suggested that they were hiding out.

They're unsure of what to do next ---- where to go --- and so they gather together lock the doors ---- and as far as we know they were just sitting there ----- waiting perhaps ----- fumbling about perhaps ---- who really knows for sure.

And then abundant life steps in.

And then Jesus steps in.

Quiet --- humble --- intimate --- personal.

And Jesus' appearance is not just physical --- it's that of course but it's also so much more ----- Jesus' appearance is yet another example of light shining in the darkness --- divine truth ---- divine light --- shedding light --- peeling back layers of obstruction --- fear ---- apprehension --- uncertainty.

As John scholar Karoline Lewis says --- "The disciples are in the darkness -- - having yet to believe or understand the events of the last three days."

"The disciples are in the darkness --- having yet to believe or understand the events of the last three days."

And then the light shines in the darkness.

And then abundant life steps into their midst.

And then the good shepherd arrives.

And then God's love incarnate once again steps into their midst.

How deep is the Father's love for us?

Deep enough to die for us.

Deep enough to come and stand among us in our darkest hour and greatest uncertainties.

This resurrection appearance today in John's Gospel is a moment of re-creation ---- new birth --- and abundant life --- it's light shining in the darkness --- it's divine revelation --- it's a whole new beginning for the disciples --- and for us.

Just as God first breathed spirit ---- breath into the world in Genesis --- so Jesus now breathes the Spirit --- new life --- breath into His Disciples.

There wasn't just a resurrection of Jesus --- on the day John describes to us today --- there wasn't just a resurrection of Jesus --- there is also a whole series of resurrections put into motion.

There are the resurrections of the disciples --- your resurrection ----- new life for you ----- and me ---- the whole of creation was resurrected that day.

Abundant life just walked into the room --- and right through the closed door.

Remember Jesus said earlier in John's Gospel --- I am the door.

In John 10 verse 9 --- Jesus said --- "I am the gate ---- or I am the door."

And so right through the door comes abundant life --- new life --- resurrection life.

And resurrection life has purpose and meaning.

Jesus doesn't just come along and among them and then fire up the BBQ or gather around the campfire for smores and a sing along.

He breathes the very Spirit of God into them.

In John's Gospel --- unlike the others ---- in John's Gospel ---- the disciples are not sent out until now.

This is their commissioning.

It is only once they have received --- been given the Holy Spirit of God that they are sent out.

This is their great commission.

Remember Matthew's Gospel concludes with these words ----

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

What is often referred to as the Great Commission.

Well in John 20 we have John's version of the Great Commission -----  
 “Jesus says in verse 21 --- “Peace be with you.” ---- and ---- “As the father has sent me I am sending you.” ----- and then He breathes into them saying -----  
 “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

“Receive the Holy Spirit...----- and forgive.”

Quiet --- humble --- intimate --- personal --- their commission.

For John the birth of the church happened in this room on this day.

And curiously ----- and encouragingly ----- it starts out in fear ----- but it ends in great joy.

There has been a great and dramatic change of events ---- reversal of fortunes.

Jesus has been killed ---- dead buried.

And now another great change --- reversal of fortunes ---- He's alive again.

He's alive --- He's dead --- and then wait a minute ---- He's alive again.

The disciples have been through the ringer ---- Jesus has been killed ---- and John's makes it clear that the disciples didn't yet understand this --- remember verse 9 from last week ----- from John chapter 20 --- "They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead." ----- and then today ---- "On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders"

They didn't understand ---- they were in the dark ----- and they were fearful.

It must have been an awful feeling --- huddled up in the dark ---- lacking understanding --- fearful --- wondering where your leader was ---- wondering what was going to happen next --- apprehension ---- fear --- uncertainty.

But then abundant life walked into the room.

But then abundant life walked into the room.

And then the profound and deep and saving love of God appeared among them once again.

What sweet relief.

God can take a room full of fear --- and uncertainty --- and lack of trust ---- and turn it into a place of joy and renewal in an instant.

You know how I mentioned earlier about feeling some of the same things the disciples were feeling.

Fearful --- discouraged ----- tired ----- uncertain.

Doubtful --- questioning ----- lost --- abandoned.

Have you ever felt any of these things and then suddenly --- quietly --- intimately ---- you feel them lifted off you --- suddenly disappearing.

As if a great weight has been lifted off your shoulders.

Anyone ever felt that --- sure ---- we all have right.

An experience of great peace --- or joy --- or relief ---- or respite --- choose your own word ---- you know what you felt --- they're incredible moments -- - where a great burden is suddenly lifted from you ----- and you can breath again ---- and everything is lighter and freer.

Anybody had that kind of powerful Gospel experience recently? --- that beautiful calming presence that only God can provide as He lifts a great weight off your shoulders?

Well that's what the disciples felt as Jesus came and stood among them on the day of the resurrection.

"The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord." ---- verse 20 recounts today.

Just moments before it was locked doors and fear ---- and darkness --- and now they are overjoyed.

Years ago I used to work on the production and security staff at the university --- it was mostly big huge football players and then little old me -- - setting up for the concerts --- sound ---- lighting --- stage ---- security barriers and so on ---- and then working security during the event.

And if you know how university campus's can get during frosh week you know it can get pretty rowdy --- and pretty quickly.

And whenever things would start to get testy --- and you could feel a challenge coming ---- someone on staff --- often me because I loved the phrase ---- and still do ---- but someone on the staff would always say --- "O.K. so somebody panic."

"O.K. so somebody panic."

"Somebody panic." ---- and we would say it because we didn't want to be run by panic --- it would be ---- "Somebody panic." --- so we could get the panic out of the way and then make good decisions and handle things calmly and intentionally.



Are people familiar with this phrase --- “Somebody panic.” ---- I think it’s a great technique for handling stress ---- it’s worked for me for years and it worked for the crew the 5 or 6 years I worked on the production and security staff at McMaster University in Hamilton.

Panic rarely yields faithful fruit.

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The disciples didn’t really panic did they?

They were fearful but they didn’t panic.

Maybe --- just maybe before Jesus entered the room one of them said --- “So somebody panic.” --- and they all laughed --- calmed down and despite being fearful relaxed a bit.

And fear and panic are 2 completely different things right --- you can be fearful but never ever panic.

Maybe just maybe one of the disciples said --- “Somebody panic.” ---- and they all chuckled and then sighed a sigh of relief --- a brief moment of respite.

You can’t go from fear to joy if your response to fear is panic.

You can’t go from fear to joy if your response to fear is panic.

You can however go from fear to joy if your response to fear is calm and deliberate and intentional ---- trusting --- waiting for the next movement.

“The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.”

Abundant life walked into their midst --- there was no open door but ---- The door ---- The good shepherd --- abundant life ----- the Risen Sovereign Lord of the universe ---- stood among them and said --- “Peace be with you as the Father has sent me so I am sending you.”

And fear quickly dissipated to joy.

Like mist and morning dew their fear was gone and joy was left in its place.

God's love is deep.

As Leonard Cohen put it --- Jesus ---- God's love sinks beneath your wisdom like stone.

God's love is deeper than we can ever venture.

God's love is so profound for us that in the midst of our sorrow and confusion and fear ---- in the midst of great change ---- uncertainty in our lives.

In the midst of ----- "They have taken the Lord away and I don't where they have put Him." --- Mary just before our passage today on the morning of the resurrection.

Amidst great grief ----- Jesus comes and stands among us and says --- "Peace be with you." ----- and breathes into us the Holy Spirit of God.

This for me is one of those passages that has literally rendered me speechless.

On more than one occasion I've read this and been left absolutely speechless.

And on more than one occasion I've read this and wept.

Silence.

Tears of joy.

Sweet relief.

Resurrection relief.

That out of death comes new life.

That in order for new life to come something had to die off.

That despite fear God can come and provide great and everlasting joy.

Sometimes we have to sit in grief and sorrow and loss before we can ever come to appreciate new life --- new opportunity.

The disciples were sitting in confusion.

The disciples didn't yet understand all that had happened --- it was too much to take in ----- death --- death on a cross --- brutal death --- betrayal ---- mocking and so on --- great suffering.

God loves us so much that whatever it takes He'll do it in order to save us.

That's how deep His love is for us.

The people had no idea what it was going to take --- the great suffering of the cross.

But God did.

Even when they gathered in fear the very day the miracle had occurred and they had been told what had happened ---- they still really had no idea.

But God did.

How deep the Father's love for us indeed.

We don't know what we need.

We don't know what we need in life --- in faith --- to grow and flourish and mature --- to be sanctified.

We don't know what it is going to take ---- sometimes we think we do --- but in truth we don't know what we need to endure in order to grow.

But God does.

And the moment we are uncertain ----- may just be the moment God bursts into our midst.

The disciples didn't even leave a door open for Jesus to come back ----- they knew He was walking around again --- Mary had already told them --- but they didn't even leave the door open ----- thankfully Jesus didn't need an open door.

He is the door --- and so He appeared among them in their darkest hour ----- He the way --- the truth and the life.

And we have to believe this --- we have to trust.

We have to believe based on someone else's testimony that it actually happened ---- we have to trust.

We have to believe even though we cannot see.

The disciples got to see ---- we don't --- at least not yet.

But we have to believe.

“Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” --- Jesus says at the end of our passage today.

“...blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” ---- that's us.

We haven't gotten to see His hands and side --- not yet anyway.

The question is do we believe? --- the question is do we trust?

Do we believe that --- even though we can't see it ---- God's love is deep enough and profound enough and saving enough that we can put all our trust in Him?

And of course the answer is yes ---- yes it is.

Because like the disciples --- abundant life has come and stood among us.

Because like the disciples we too have huddled all up in fear.

Because like the disciples we too have been troubled and anxious.

And like the disciples the Risen Lord has come and stood among us offering us peace and breathing the Holy Spirit into us and into our lives.

All we need is Jesus.

We don't need Jesus and... \_\_\_\_\_!

All we need is Jesus.

All we need is God's love for us.

God's great and saving love for us.

Unfortunately we too often want more and look in all the wrong places.

All we need is Jesus --- all we need is God's profound and saving love.

When we're fearful of failing at something --- trust God --- even if we fail --  
- He's still got us.

When we're afraid we might mess things up if we stand up and say what we think needs to be said --- trust God --- He's got it.

If you're afraid to try a new venture.

If you're afraid to change something about yourself --- your home --- your car --- your relationship --- your job --- trust God.

He's got this.

His deep and profound love for us will sustain us.

“So do not fear, for I am with you;  
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.  
I will strengthen you and help you;  
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” --- Isaiah said ---- we heard it read earlier.

And then also from Isaiah --- we also heard this read earlier too ----

“But now listen, Jacob, my servant,

Israel, whom I have chosen.

This is what the Lord says—

he who made you, who formed you in the womb,

and who will help you:

Do not be afraid, Jacob, my servant,

Jeshurun, whom I have chosen.

For I will pour water on the thirsty land,

and streams on the dry ground;

I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring,

and my blessing on your descendants.

They will spring up like grass in a meadow,  
like poplar trees by flowing streams.”

We don't live in fear --- we don't panic --- we don't work from a place of fear.

“For I will pour water on the thirsty land,

and streams on the dry ground;” ----- we don't need to panic.

“Somebody panic.” --- there we've said it ---- it's over ---- now we can make good choices instead of jumpy ones.

Jesus found the disciples a little unsure today ----- so He reassures them.

And not only this but this is the moment He chose to commission them.

Sometimes we have to reach the end of our rope before God will give us something to do --- trust us with something.

Sometimes God wants to know there is none of us left ---- remember Jesus emptied Himself Paul said --- Jesus emptied Himself --- sometimes God wants to see us empty ourselves before He decides to use us --- before he can ever use us.

The disciples were at the end of their rope in John today and Jesus comes and commissions them and breathes the Holy Spirit into them --- saying ---  
“As the Father sent me so I am sending you.”

God's love is so great --- and so beautiful --- and so true --- and so good ---  
there is nothing to panic about.

“So do not fear, for I am with you;  
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.  
I will strengthen you and help you;  
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

How deep the Father's love for us.

Thanks to the cross ----- thanks to Easter ---- all fear is gone.

Thanks to the cross --- thanks to Easter ----- the need to panic has passed.

“God is our refuge and our strength --- a very present help in trouble  
therefore we will not fear.”

And then Jesus' words today ---- “Peace be with you.”

In our darkest time --- when we're all locked up behind closed doors.

God comes and stands in our midst offering peace and breathing the Holy  
Spirit.

And that is how deep God's love is for us.

“Peace be with us ---- for God is among us.”

Amen.