

April 19, 2020 Sermon
John 20:19-31

“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.’”

It was the day after Jesus’ tomb had been found empty. Mary had discovered the empty tomb, and shared the news with Peter and the other disciple who shall remain nameless...mainly because we don’t know who it was. Those two men, believing her or not believing, ran to the tomb to see for themselves, and of course, found the tomb to be empty.

We are now with the disciples, hiding behind a closed door because they are afraid that what happened to *Jesus*, is going to happen to *them*. And while they are cowering together in this locked room, Jesus shows up and says, “Peace be with you.” He showed them all his hands and his side and, as we are told, the disciples rejoiced in knowing that this was, indeed, the Lord. And Jesus says to them, once again, “*Peace* be with you.”

Remember back on March 15 when we were just getting used to hearing the words “Corona Virus?” There weren’t many people in the sanctuary that morning. Some had already decided to socially distance themselves from other people. It was very strange to stand in the pulpit and announce that there would be no worship for the next couple Sundays. I even gave people permission to leave if they felt they needed to at that very moment.

As people left the building following worship, we shook hands for one last time (not realizing at the time that shaking hands was probably not a good thing to do) and scattered and scampered off to our respective homes. Everything that had to do with St. James had been canceled or put on hold until it was safe to come out, so to speak. Surely, we would be back in the sanctuary by Easter. We just HAD to be, but it was NOT to be.

I left the church on March 15 feeling like the rug had been pulled out from under us, wondering how, and if, everyone would stay in contact with one another. I woke up in the mornings wondering if my children would be safe, or if even *I* would be safe. Was *this* the way my *life* would end? I would be the Pastor of a church for a while and then I would do something as simple as buying groceries, catch a bug from someone in the toilet bowl cleaner aisle and *poof!* I'd be gone in a *matter of days*? I knew I had to pull myself together because if *I* was feeling this way, *how* was everyone *else* feeling?

Then I started to see the hand of God creeping in. I saw it in the ads on television, that had been created *especially* to calm people. The phrase, "we're all in this together" became almost as well known as the term *corona* virus. People were posting *prayers* and *thoughts* and *morning* prayers and *Bible studies* on social media and *I* became more and more aware that **yes**, we ARE all in this together, and **yes** God in Christ **IS** speaking to us and he **is** saying "Peace be with you!"

We are offered the peace of Christ because Christ has *overcome* the world. Jesus suffered and died for moments Just. Like. These. Life is not all fun and games. We *all* know that, but life has never been like life is *now*. We have never been required to stay in our homes in order to keep from *getting* a virus or worse yet, *giving* a virus to someone else without knowing we were doing it. And yet, the world keeps turning. Life goes on...maybe in a more difficult way, but life goes on.

And look what's happening as we all *hunker* down. They say the air quality in China is clearing up because people were not out and about. People living in India can see the Himalayas...something they say has not happened in **years**. *California's* air is not as thick and heavy as it once was.

We're not driving as much, so some insurance companies are giving discounts on car insurance rates. We're *listening* to music *more*. We're talking on the *phone* more, *checking* on one another. I've had several offers from people to pick up something at the grocery store if I needed it.

People simply seem a little more *helpful* and *caring*. And people say it's been the most beautiful spring they've ever seen. Is it more beautiful than springs *past* or are we just paying more *attention* because we have nothing else to do?

We are in the midst of the worst crisis I have ever seen and hope to ever see, and *still* God shows up. God in Christ shows up and says, "*Peace be with you.*"

He shows up in the faces of those in the healthcare profession. He shows up behind the wheel of an ambulance or a fire truck or in a police car. God in Christ is there in every grocery store checkout clerk, those who bag your groceries and yes...especially those who are keeping the carts clean.

"*Peace be with you*" he says, as people gather at meetings through Zoom or conference calls or through online choirs that make some of the most beautiful music I've ever heard. And what *makes* that music beautiful? It's the fact that people aren't doing things just for themselves.

People are doing things to make *other* people *happy*...they're doing things so others will *know* that they are not alone. We might all be on pins and needles, wondering when and if the virus is going to strike us, but in the meantime, Jesus says, "*here's a little music to calm you.*" "*Here's a phone call to help you get through your day.*" "*Let me just nudge this not-all-that-familiar-neighbor into asking if you need some eggs.*" *Peace.*

The disciples were behind locked doors in fear of what was on the other side, and *Jesus shows up*. Jesus showed up for *them*, just as he shows up for *us*. And we don't know when we will all be together again, but were we really *ever apart*?

The Holy Spirit gathers us together, whether it's through a phone call, a card, a letter, a Ziploc bag of homemade rolls slid across the front porch, or even through social media, and the Holy Spirit sends us out into the world, even if it's not really physically OUT into the world, and all the while, God in Christ says to us, "*Peace be with you!*"

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen!

Happy Second Sunday of Easter!
Pastor Paula