

Sunday Update
11th April 2021

John 20:19-29

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!' 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. 21 Again Jesus said, 'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.' 22 And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.' 24 Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord!' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.' 26 A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!' 27 Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.' 28 Thomas said to him, 'My Lord and my God!' 29 Then Jesus told him, 'Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'

Have you done anything exciting this week? I've had a haircut!! That shows you how life has been for the last three months, when getting my hair cut counts as exciting, but for a lot of people that has been the highlight of the week. The Lockdown rules are being relaxed little by little, allowing us a bit more freedom, and that is something of a relief to us. However, there is still a good deal of fear about; we are still afraid of what might yet happen if Covid comes back yet again. Lots of us are still cautious about moving too quickly into post-lockdown life, just in case... That is one of the reasons why the Kirk Session has not been in a hurry to open up the Church building for Sunday services; we feel it is right to be cautious, just in case things go wrong again and we don't want to be the cause of things going wrong for people in our community. For some, the fear is stronger than that; they just won't go out until they are sure that it is safe to do so. Of course, there are some who have no fear of Covid and will push the boundaries as far as they can and as fast as they can; they see themselves as immortal!

Our reading today takes us to Jerusalem on the evening of Easter Sunday. The disciples are in their rooms with the doors locked, in a kind of self-imposed "lockdown"! By now, they know that Jesus' body is missing, but we can't be sure how much more they know or understand. Mary will have told them that she has seen the Lord and they had to believe her earlier when she told them about the tomb being empty, but can they believe her again? John tells us that they have put themselves in lockdown "*for fear of the Jews*" (verse 19) – what does that mean? The most obvious answer is that because they are known to be followers of Jesus, then the Jews will do to them what they did to Jesus, arrest them and have them killed. That would have been a very real danger. But there is a slightly more complicated possibility. The word has got round; Jesus' body is missing, and some are saying that they have seen him alive. Maybe the disciples are now afraid that the Jews are going to accuse them of stealing the body to make up a story about resurrection and have them arrested to nip that story in the bud! So they are behind locked doors because they are afraid!

Then Jesus appears in the room, passed the locked doors. It ends well, but I wonder how the disciples feel at first. Remember, the last time they had been in a room with Jesus, He had raised the question of betrayal; since then, Peter had three times denied knowing Jesus, and they had all run away. Are they afraid of what Jesus will say? Did they expect censure and rebuke? Is Jesus going to be angry with them? Instead, Jesus does three things: first of all, He speaks words of peace to them; then secondly,

He gives them a job to do, a mission in life; and thirdly, He promises to be with them by His Spirit, to give them strength and help for living their lives. In a way, Jesus is treating them as if nothing has happened and they have done nothing to let Him down. He understands what happened; He knows their weakness and He forgives them, treating them as if they had done nothing wrong. These three words touch our lives and our fears, as we live in that middle place between all that makes us afraid and looking to the future with hope in our hearts.

“Peace be with you!” (verse 19) These are Jesus’ first words to His fearful disciples. What a relief to them. These are encouraging, pleasant words, words that greet the disciples, words that wish them well. “Shalom” is the Hebrew equivalent and that is about more than peace, more than the absence of fear or righting; peace is “life at its best under the gracious hand of God” (Bruce Milne) and that touches every aspect of life. Jesus brings peace to our lives. He comes to us, offering us life at its very best, life with God at the centre. That doesn’t always mean an easy life, nor always a happy life, but a life lived by faith and a life lived being loved by God come what may.

“As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” (verse 21) Here’s a job to do. Jesus always had a strong sense of mission, that He has come to do the work that His Father had given Him to do. His part in that mission was completed at the cross; on the cross His mission was accomplished, and the salvation of the world was achieved. On the evening of Easter Sunday, His disciples are commissioned to phase 2 of that mission, telling the world what Jesus has done and living out Jesus’ values in the world. That is our calling today, as people who walk in the footsteps of the apostles; our calling as Christians is to live out Jesus’ values and tell others about Him when the opportunity arises.

“He breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (verse 22) Jesus knew that they couldn’t live by faith and do mission in their own strength. He knew that they needed help. That help came through the Holy Spirit. At Pentecost, the Spirit would be given to the Church in a new way and through the Spirit, Jesus would be with them and they would have strength to live their lives well. The same Spirit lives in us, and does the same things for us; the Spirit is Jesus with us; the Spirit strengthens us, and helps us to live by faith and to serve Jesus.

We live at a time when we don’t really know what happens next. The world is trying to come out of lockdown, but it is not working in some places; we’re fearful that some of that might happen here. Our Church building remains closed for now and we’re not yet sure when that will change and what the circumstances will be that allow that to happen. The Church of Scotland is dealing with some major issues for the future and we’re uncertain as to what that future will look like. Personally, many of us are dealing with anxieties and concerns about the days to come, either for ourselves or for families and friends. Into that mess of fear and anxiety, Jesus comes to us. He speaks words of peace, offering us the gift of life at its best; He challenges us to live by Jesus’ values, to care for other people and to share His story; He promises to be with us by the Spirit, with us always and everywhere to guide us and give us strength. Here is good news to help us when we’re afraid.

Prayer: Father, we thank You that Jesus always lives and that the disciples saw Him alive. We thank You for His words of peace and for His promise to be with us always and everywhere through the Spirit; calm our fears by the simple sense of Your being with us, walking with us through the uncertain paths of life, helping us, and giving us strength. Help us, O Lord, and give us the courage to rise to the challenge of our mission, living by Jesus’ values and telling His story to others when we have the opportunity.

Day by day, dear Lord of you

Three things I pray:

To see you more clearly,

To love you more dearly,

To follow you more nearly,

Day by day.

Please take time during the week to pray for the people referred to in these topics:

- For people who are frightened and anxious about the world they live in, fears for themselves or for other people, and feeling overwhelmed by these fears; Lord, bring them peace and hope deep in their hearts and minds.
- For the Church to have a sense of mission, knowing that we are called by Jesus to serve God and to serve the world; let that sense of mission inspire the local church to be better at what it does and draw other people to Jesus by the work done by the local church.
- For people who have contracted Covid and are in hospital, that they make a good recovery; those NHS staff who are caring for them, under pressure by the numbers of people in hospital and trying to manage the care they provide.
- For people who mourn because a loved one has died; help them to find comfort and peace; for the process of grief that goes on and those who feel the effects of lockdown on their deepest emotions and feelings of loss.
- For the roll-out of the vaccine to be efficient and effective, reaching the people who need it most; for those waiting for the letter; for the vaccine to make people safe, as promised.
- For the opening-up of things after lockdown; some businesses opening on April 5th; all children going back to school full-time after the holidays; other restrictions being lifted later this month; continue to pray for safety and for good health for the population, that there will be no more spikes in the virus and that people will behave responsibly.
- For people who are still isolating, still spending time on their own again and feeling afraid; for people in care homes, beginning to meet family again, and the staff who care for them.
- For schools: pupils and teachers on holiday for the next two weeks, but then going back full-time; for pupils to settle back down to a routine and to stay safe; for teachers who are trying to manage classes as well as teach and catch up with lost work.
- For communities and businesses: the pubs and hotels and others preparing to open again; for those who own these businesses and it is their livelihood; for those who work and are still on furlough; for the gaps left in the social interaction of many people, adding to their sense of isolation.
- For Churches, some buildings open and some still closed; help them to care for all of their people; may the technology be a lifeline for lots of people; help churches across Scotland to be a light in their community and share the light of Jesus with others.
- For people we know...
- This week, take time to think about these words and pray them into your own heart: *“Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.” (Joshua 1:9)*

Here are some links to hymns you might know and love.

Crown Him with many crowns

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YuMh_ept-Js

Christ Triumphant

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rxJg2Xm46dl>

All heaven declares

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l8y86qnKkmM>

Do not be afraid

[\(1\) Do Not be Afraid, For I Have Redeemed You \[with lyrics for congregations\]](#)

[- YouTube](#)

I heard the voice of Jesus say

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XUVCpF8-VuE>

Remember the prayer e-mail line at prayerigpc@gmail.com

Some other resources:

- Each Sunday at 10.30am, we will have a short time together using Zoom; a link has been sent out in the e-mail with this update which should enable you to join in.
- This reflection is available on our own church website under the “sermons” tab and there is an archive of sermon material there for you to read and links to the video reflections – www.igpc.org.uk
- If you have a smartphone, a tablet or an i-pad, the Bible2020 app will give you a short bible reading each day (from the Scottish Bible Society)
- Scripture Union daily bible readings can be found at <https://content.scriptureunion.org.uk/wordlive>
- The Church of Scotland website has prayers and reflections from the Moderator and details of lots of on-line streamed church services - <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/>
- Claremont Church in East Kilbride are making services available over a phone line: here are the contact details which you can share with people who are not on line: **Sunday Services @ 10:30 - same details every week** 020 3937 2973; PIN: 352 598 857#

DAILY BIBLE STUDY MATERIALS - New issues of “**Word For Today**” and “**Word For You Today**” Booklets for February, March and April are now available. Please contact Michael Merriman who will be delighted to arrange copies. Other Bible Study materials are also available with Ian Aitken. **Let the Bible feed you.**

Heather is on holiday this week, so there are no other resources today.

