

“Where Do You Go When You Are Frightened?”

John 20:19-23

Preached by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor
Smoke Rise Baptist Church
Stone Mountain, Georgia
April 3, 2005

I wish I could have heard the conversation that night. Who talked? What did they say? Did they whisper out of fear that someone would hear them?

Most of us have an interest in what goes on behind the scene. At least the media think so. As soon as a major event occurs, reporters interview the people involved to get as many details as possible. What they discover fills books and makes movies.

John doesn't give us a lot of behind the scene details on Easter evening when the disciples were huddled in a locked room. None of their conversation was recorded. However, he does mention two emotions they were feeling, fear that turned to joy after Jesus entered the room.

Put yourself in that situation. Had you been with the disciples that evening, what would you have needed and wanted Jesus to provide? I would have needed a lot of reassurance and guidance. I think the disciples did, too, and Jesus knew it.

So what did Jesus do? What did he provide for them that they desperately needed? From John's account, I detect three things, **peace, direction and power**. How encouraging! Let's look at the text.

When Jesus entered the room, what did he say? **“Peace be with you!”** After showing them his scars to erase any doubt about his identity, he said again, “Peace be with you!”

Why the strong emphasis on peace? The disciples were frightened and had every reason to be. They wondered if the religious authorities, who had shown no mercy in recent days, were content crucifying Jesus or if they would come searching for them, too. This was why they were locked away in a secluded room that evening. The end of the Sabbath heightened their sense of anxiety and fear. Jesus knew this and quickly addressed it. His first words were meant to calm them.

“Peace be with you!” The ability to bring peace to troubled hearts is a gift, isn't it? Jesus had it. By God's grace, others do, too. Their very presence or the tone of their voice can reassure disturbed hearts and calm troubled nerves.

Who did this for you? Who appeared just when you needed them most and calmed your restless nerves? How did you feel about them?

I can only imagine how the disciples felt when they saw Jesus and heard his voice. What a difference he made in their lives that evening. Surely they passed this gift on to others as they became the peaceful presence of Christ in the lives of frightened people.

I hope you have shared this gift with others around you, too. Few gifts you could give someone would be more necessary or valuable.

Isn't this the gift that Ashley Smith gave Bryan Nichols? With God's help, she brought peace to his troubled soul and changed the course of history.

I think God calls all of us to this ministry and I can think of nothing our world needs more. We live in stressful times fraught with anxiety and fear. People are crying out for peace in the midst of turmoil and conflict. We need to let God work through us to bring it to them. I hope you are.

There was something else Jesus provided those frightened disciples on Easter evening and that was **guidance**. He knew they were confused about many things, especially what was expected of them after the crucifixion. Jesus' death caught them by surprise and changed everything. Did the dream die with him? Was their job completed? Were they to disband and go back home? What were they to do?

Jesus was aware of their uncertainty. He reassured them that their job was not finished and they were not to return to life as they knew it prior to following him. As a matter of fact, the opposite was true. Their responsibilities would increase as their ministry expanded.

What was their ministry to be? What were they to do after the crucifixion and resurrection? They were to be God's agents of liberation, setting people free from the bondage of sin.

"As the Father has sent me, I am sending you. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven" John 20:21, 23.

Just as Jesus needed his disciples to bring peace to a troubled world he needed them to proclaim the good news of forgiveness. He needed them to tell people that mistakes from their past did not need to determine their future. God would help them chart a new course, healing broken relationships and building healthy ones. He would help them make wise decisions that would produce good results.

Jesus needed his disciples to leave that secure room and go into an insecure world where they could positively impact hurting people with the transforming power of love. He knew, however, this would not be easy. The crisis they had been through drained the life out of them. It took away their courage and confidence. Leaving that room to continue Jesus' work, no matter how bold and honorable, would be the biggest challenge they faced. They could not do it without help.

Jesus was aware of this, for look how he responded to their need. "He breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit' " John 20:22.

You recognize that this was John's account of Pentecost, the indwelling of God's powerful and personal Spirit in the hearts of His believers. There is also a connection to Genesis 2:7, "The Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living being."

Just as God breathed life into man at creation, Jesus had to breathe new life into his disciples after the crucifixion. The trauma of that horrible event left them hopeless and lifeless. Nothing less than the creative breath of God could restore them.

John wanted us to know that Jesus did not send the disciples into the world ill equipped to accomplish their mission. The same power that enabled Jesus to be faithful all the way to the cross, recreating him on Easter morning was available to them.

It is also available to us. As a matter of fact, everything Jesus provided the disciples that night can be ours: peace, direction and power.

Perhaps you identify with the disciples. You have been through a crisis that has left you confused and scared. Your spirit is restless. You are not sure what to do or if you even have the strength to do it. Like the disciples, you would prefer to stay behind locked doors, secluded from all challenges and fears.

If this describes you, I want you to hear this message of hope. Jesus is searching for you because he wants to enter your world just as he did the disciples on Easter evening. He wants to give you peace, direction and power. It is my prayer you will welcome him and receive these life-changing gifts.