

Life in the Power of the Resurrection  
A sermon by David Roquemore  
First Presbyterian Church, Newton NC  
April 7, 2024

John 20: 19-31

So here we are, the evening of the day of resurrection. The disciples are locked in a room and they are scared. What will happen to them? They saw their leader and teacher crucified and killed. They are scared this will be their fate too! The Jewish leaders will accuse them, and they will be hauled up the hill to the cross. They can see no way out — even if they try to leave, where will they go?

But suddenly, Jesus is there. He doesn't knock on the door, he doesn't come in by the door. He is simply "there" — as alive as you and me. He says, "Peace be with you!" And he breathes on them — he says, "receive the Holy Spirit."

What Jesus does here is transform their fear into peace. They are no longer afraid. The threat is still out there; they don't know what the Jewish leaders and the Romans may do. But they aren't afraid now, because Jesus is with them. The Risen Lord is with them.

It isn't too much of a stretch to say that the Risen Lord is with us! Jesus lives just as lived then, and he brings the Holy Spirit to us just as he brought it to those first disciples. Jesus wants us to live in the power of the Holy Spirit, in the power of the resurrection, just as they did then. In one sense, it is as though no time has passed. He is here in this room with us!

I don't know what you might be afraid of — some people are afraid one candidate or another will win the election. Some are afraid of the liberals, or the conservatives. Some are afraid that this country is going to the dogs. Whatever it is that scares you, be aware that Jesus isn't scared. He brings us peace. The enemies might be right there in front of us, scaring us to death, but he isn't afraid.

Maybe it's disease! That scares most of us — as we get older, (not that applies to any of you, but you may know someone...) but as we get older, we are threatened with diseases and stuff. You are feeling just fine, but then you get this news... sometimes it is life-threatening, other times not. All of it you could do without! And we get afraid.

Or maybe you are afraid of inflation, of the financial world collapsing, that you won't have enough money to last till the end of your life, — things like that. Those fears can be very real and legitimate.

We spend most or at least, much of our time worrying about these things. What will we do if this happens, or that?

Jesus tells us that we shouldn't do that, that worrying won't add one second to our lives. He says, "have peace," So how do we do that, how do we move from fear to peace?

We remember that we serve the Risen Lord. He is king of the universe, a big deal, and so nothing threatens him nor stands in his way. With that we find confidence!

I remember one time I was filled with uncertainty. I was at a retreat at my first church. I walked around a corner, and I heard the voice of God saying, "Shalom! Be at peace!" Later I realized that the cabin in front of me had "shalom" on it in Hebrew letters — so I probably saw that unconsciously and "read" them without realizing it. However you understand it, that came as a word of peace to me, and gave me great comfort. Eventually I was ordained and the rest is history. We can't forget who we serve!

We are sent! Jesus was sent on a mission to live with us, and sends his disciples out on a mission to the world. Once we realize we serve the Risen Lord, we are set free to participate in his mission to all the world, to tell people the good news, to work for the reconciliation of the world, to oppose evil in all its forms, to proclaim the Risen Lord wherever we go. We are "ambassadors of Christ," ready to serve his will and his calling at every moment.

And to give them the power to do this, Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit on them. In Acts we read the dramatic way that the Spirit fell upon the gathered disciples at Pentecost, which comes in a few weeks. Here John tells us Jesus gave it to the inner circle of disciples that first night! The Spirit brings power with him, so that those who live in the Spirit are able to do great things, powerful works, for Jesus.

My old friend Wesley Baker used to end worship services with an adaptation of the familiar exhortation, "Go in peace. Heal the sick, comfort the afflicted, repay no one evil for evil." He'd add, to the end of it, "and raise the dead!" After the first Sunday, someone asked him what he meant — he said, well, you believe in the Holy Spirit, so there's no telling what the Spirit might do!" We can do powerful things if we believe!

Of course, some of us are like Thomas, poor maligned doubting Thomas. He said he couldn't believe any of it until he saw Jesus with his own eyes. He wanted to see and feel his wounds. He wanted proof. He's like one of us!

So Jesus appears again a week later, and shows Thomas his wounds. Thomas believes! And Jesus says, Blessed are those who have not seen — that would be us! — and have come to believe.

So here we see the power of the Holy Spirit at work. We see that we can believe, even if we do not see him with our own eyes. We see that prayer will draw us closer to the Spirit, and lead us to "see" more.

The Spirit is alive and among us, even today. I invite you to open yourself to him, to pray that the Spirit will be poured out upon you, that you will experience the power of the

Spirit in your life, in whatever you do from day to day, and so in that way, you will draw closer to God. When you do that, God will absolutely draw close to you!

Thanks be to God! Amen.