

## Jesus, Prince of Peace | John 20:19-31; 1 Peter 1:3-9 | LUMC | 4-16, 2023

Dear Church Family and Friends: In Passion Week Jesus experienced gut-wrenching moments. He endured the very painful death of his human body! This death affected his widowed mother. She helplessly watched her own son being tortured and killed by her very people, the Jews. She was utterly traumatized like most parents are as they watch their own children dying. It's a lifelong trauma!

Jesus' disciples also watched their three-years mission leader dying mercilessly! His death also affected the recent believers, including Lazarus, the Samaritan woman, Nicodemus, and others. Most people did not know what to do without Jesus.

The trauma we experienced during the past Passion Week cannot be compared with the disciples' and Jesus' family's trauma because the concept of his resurrection had not been fully conceived then as we know it today. We partly experience the pain, but we're also aware that Jesus overcame death—he resurrected and is with us in the Spirit.

Indeed, Jesus overcame the torture and death experienced during the Passion Week. We just celebrated his resurrection and witnessed the birth of the church, against the backdrop of Jesus' killers who sought permission to secure and guard the grave until Jesus' body had decomposed so his disciples could not take him. The environment of Israel causes dead bodies to significantly decompose, releasing gasses and bad odors within two days. By the third day the enemies of the cross thought they had succeeded. But God had other plans—to raise Jesus from the dead on the third day, a period thought impossible to have a fresh body. God is wiser than the finite human mind.

Today John describes Jesus' miracle—his first appearance to his disciples after his resurrection, when he pronounced shalom or “peace” three times. The first peace is a form of greetings, the second peace is a declaration that sinners are fully and completely forgiven of their sins, and the third peace is a prayer, a Christian job description before being sent to do God's mission.

Jesus appeared on the Sunday evening of resurrection to encourage fearful disciples, to herald a new beginning of the Church and her mission. When Jesus suddenly appeared, he used the Hebrew term; *shalom* or “Peace” in English. Shalom is used here in form of greetings and announcement of the forgiven life. Jesus was saying to the disciples, “My blood was spilled to win you wholly and completely, and so to freely relate with God. God has now forgiven the human sinful soul and God will consider their past sins no more!”

Jesus is saying to those who believe in him, “From now on you will live wholly, a prospering life, a life lived in tranquility.” Whenever I hear or read the term “PEACE” it reminds me God is greeting us, saying, “Hello, I have completely forgiven you because of Christ's blood that spilled on the cross. I will care for your total health and welfare. And I will consider you my children forever.”

And as God's children we are! Amen!

The disciples celebrated Jesus' presence and felt physical strength. Fear dissipated and their souls began to rejuvenate. During that first encounter, they may have asked questions such as how death felt or how he dealt with the outright inciters and the humiliations, and denials.

But Jesus may not have engaged that kind of common talk in the village, He may have left it to the disciples to have their own interpretations. Jesus interrupted their celebrations and moved deeper to pronounce again, "Peace be with you, as the Father sent me, so I send you." Jesus did not let fear overcome the disciples, the target of the Pharisees. The Pharisees had just declared that people were prohibited from talking about Jesus or from practicing Jesus' teaching. It was like a present-day court's gag orders that limit people from discussing pending case outside the court. The Pharisee law was meant to prohibit the spread of Jesus' teachings, but Jesus countered this new law. We know that "officially" the Holy Spirit came not after Jesus rose to heaven, but during this first meeting with the disciples. He introduced the Holy Spirit by breathing him into them a special dispensation.

When the Holy Spirit was given, these believers were assigned their first job description: the Holy Spirit was to empower them to forgive sins of those who repent,<sup>1</sup> to cast out demons, and to forbid evil doers. This goal should not be taken lightly. Over the years, across all ages, space and time, believers have witnessed the power of the Holy Spirit. They have relied on the Holy Spirit in the midst of temptations, in the midst of physical danger, and when their faith has been doubted and minimized.

I have encouraged you to stay close to the nudging of the Holy Spirit and do God's will. Jesus sent the disciples out, aware of secular law and cultural animosity and the negative political environment. The disciples could not manage to carry on the Good News in their own strength. It is like in modern times, when the faithful are becoming a minority in this country and the Christian culture is competing with secular cultures. Places of worship are slowly turning into social gatherings devoid of prayers and scripture readings.

Some people have cherished the occasion to compete for self-survival. In some cultures, Christian faith practice is restricted, and those who worship do so in private, while in other places people are free to worship, yet they do so as if they fear to be seen.

Jesus died a long time ago, and we believe that death took place, resurrection took place, and He lives in our lives. We do not need scientific proof beyond what the

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<sup>1</sup> It is not easy for God to forgive premeditated and habitual sins because part of human heart's desire to sin rather than to do good. The intentional sins are planned, like most murders, all sexual acts, theft, pride, or fights and grievous hatred. These are not casual sins like anger or outbursts that easily come from unregulated emotions. The intentional sinners have no room to seek forgiveness; they constantly continue sinning. Their sinning becomes their habits. The continued intentional sins changes brain chemistry and disables their ability to think straight—they cloud the mind. Habitual sinners recruit innocent believers, their families, and friends to join their devious thoughts, and others join without being aware what they are being sold out. I encourage everyone to be careful from being sold out to sins and who continue sinning habitually. I am careful to not get into anything God does not approve for my life and ministry. How I pray everyone be careful as well.

Bible says along with the living stories of the saints down through the ages. We believe because over 3 billion people do, and we cannot all be brainless.

Jesus will continue to meet believers like He did with the disciples. The week following his resurrection, Jesus met with the disciples again and encouraged Thomas to touch the scars in his body so to believe. Even though science encourages tangible observation, and we are likely to ask evidence for everything, Jesus here teaches that faith is a matter of believing sometimes without asking for evidence. "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet they have come to believe." We believe it is true that Jesus appeared to the disciples and continues to appear in our lives at the point of need, to encourage us out of our fear, pain, loss, and grief. Jesus comes when we are in need of a lost love, or are being challenged financially, or when in political confusion.

Jesus does come and provide comfort to those who believe, to those who know their life is in God's hand, and to those whose goal is to celebrate the risen Christ and plan their everyday activities in and through Christ. St Peter reminds us that the death and resurrection of Jesus made us inherit the imperishable, undefiled and unfaded living hope for eternity. Let us be courageous despite the trials we go through. We look forward to that day we shall enter to enjoy eternity with God, Christ, angels, and the saints who have gone before us.

Jesus continues to visit believers, encouraging them to maintain peace in their lives and in the lives of those around them, to be honest in what they believe. Jesus encourages us to let the Holy Spirit send us to do mission in various ways. May we do genuine mission in power of the Holy Spirit. And may the Holy Spirit prompt us to stand against those unbelievers of the Word of God (and there are many in churches today). May God's spirit prompt us to genuinely follow Christ whenever Christ leads us. Like the disciples who overcame great challenges to grow the church, let us in the name of the living Spirit harken to Jesus, giving us the assignment to do. Let us always go where Jesus sends us to bear fruits, laboring practically and faithfully. May God's "Peace be with you," now and always. Amen