

## Resurrection

### Sermon on John 20:19-23 & 21:1-14

Fearful people sitting together.

Locked doors.

And nevertheless, Jesus comes in.

Brings peace.

Talks of peace.

Wishes them peace.

“Peace be with you”.

Is there a sentence more powerful than this?

Peace be with you...

...and then he shows the small group the marks of his torture and execution.

First the peace, and then these terrible wounds:

marks that show all Jesus had gone through; marks of those horrifying days and hours in Jerusalem which the shut-away handful of people desperately tried to forget.

At this moment Jesus reminds them all of the horror they'd been through, and teaches them that resurrection is not an alternative to the harshness of earthly life, but instead it embraces all the harshness and cruelty of earthly life and brings with it the chances of healings and new beginnings.

This was hard to bear for them, hard to grasp, but it worked.

...because of the Peace...

Peace be with you.

This peace was strong enough to let them see the wounds and yet not fall into despair; to let them face the horror of the past, but not lose hope for the future.

This peace must have been powerful enough to help them overcome the darkness and see their risen Lord. Overcome the past and see a future:

“They were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.”

And the “Peace be with you” comes again. Twice in only 5 verses of chapter 20 of the gospel of John.

The first time it comes to comfort and calm and to strengthen. It comes to encourage them to look at the terrible scars the recent past had left in their lives and to change them into something whole and new.

The second time it comes as an introduction of what is to follow: this overwhelming mission “as the father has sent me, I am sending you.”

Nothing more and nothing less.

As God has sent Jesus, so he is sending his friends, so he is sending us.

As the father has sent me – with all that it involves...

And what is even more: Jesus does not only say this. He breathes it into them – fills them with his breath, his very life.

Fills us with his breath and his life.

The “being sent” is not only an intellectual thing, it goes so much deeper, it touches our soul, fills our heart, inflames our spirit.

The breath is a sign of the holy spirit which they were then given, and which we are offered ever since.

“Receive the holy spirit”, and then continue doing what I have started, Jesus seems to say. “If you forgive, they are forgiven; if you do not...”

What you do is just as important as what I did. I am enabling you. I am encouraging you. I am sending you.

This experience of Jesus’ resurrection transformed the fearful and terrified disciples into the bold witnesses of his death and resurrection.

We cannot precisely say what this experience was. We’ve only got the various stories of people like Mary – if you remember last Sunday -, or those disciples behind locked doors, or Thomas, and we hear them exclaim “Rabbouni” and “My Lord and my God”, and we must notice that whatever happened to all of them, it was an experience which moved the disciples deeply and completely transformed them.

Jesus is risen, and appeared to them!

They’d seen him.

They ‘d met him.

He’d talked to them.

...offered to touch, and called them out... Out of those locked doors into the world to touch and heal others.

The disciples' meeting of the risen Jesus opened their eyes to see who he really was. From then on they knew that the Jesus who'd gone with them through Galilee and Judea is alive! He hadn't remained dead. He lives on, lives again. Lives in God's glory. Sits at God's right hand. Is now "Lord and God", as Thomas exclaims. God has made the one whom human beings nailed to the cross, Lord of the whole world. This is the revaluation of all values. This gives hope to all who are distressed. This offers transformation to all destruction. And it opens our eyes to the idea that even death can bear fruit?!

The disciples' encounter with the risen Lord turned their thinking completely upside down. They'd even go fishing in the bright morning, which no professional fisherman would seriously consider doing. But they seem used to surprises by now. There must be some truth to it, when he says: "Throw your net on the right side of the boat."

They do as he commands, and make the most amazing catch.

Had they thought before that this man might be Jesus, now they knew for sure. "It is the Lord", John says to Peter. And Peter – fast as ever – jumps into the water and hurries towards Jesus.

They all couldn't really understand what had happened, but they tried to interpret it in terms of what they already knew.

As did the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. They are fleeing in disappointment from Jerusalem, the place of their hope. They talk about their disappointment and how to understand it all. And while they are deep in conversation Jesus meets them. He comes towards them. But they don't recognize him.

Only when he has explained to them from the scripture the events that they have experienced and then joins them for a meal – only then do they recognize him.

But as soon as they know who he is, he becomes invisible and disappears from their sight.

What they learn from this meeting, and what we can learn from this story is, that when we run away from the disappointments of our lives, that while we are still talking about our shattered illusions, resurrection can already happen.

All of a sudden we might see the meaning, understand all that has happened... All of a sudden our eyes can be opened. From utter loneliness and despair a moment ago,

we suddenly know mysteriously that we are not alone... that the risen Christ goes with us on our way... that he cares about us, cares for us, breaks the bread for us, helps us to understand who he is and where he wants us to go.

Of course, like Mary in the garden, we can't grab him, and can't hold onto him. As soon as we recognise him, he escapes from our sight and leaves us with nothing more and nothing less than a fond and encouraging memory of him – offering a purpose and a direction to our lives.

What John says after they'd fished in vain for the whole night and then made this extraordinary catch, is crucial: this man there at the shore – it is the Lord!  
That is the experience of resurrection – for the friends of Jesus then – and for us now.

Just try to say this sentence to yourself in the middle of your work, in discussions that are getting nowhere, in conflicts which can't be resolved: it is the Lord.

This can make grey mornings brighter. It can give your everyday life another glow!  
It can cheer me up, encourage and empower me, when I know that the risen Lord is with me in the midst of my work.

I don't have to struggle all by myself! The risen Lord gives me hope that life will succeed, even if much seems dull and heavy and hopeless.

If at Christ's command "I cast the net on the right side", on the conscious side, on the patient side, the not all that well known side, it may be filled.

If I work confidently, fearlessly, attentively and carefully, there may be more fish than I can ever pull ashore...

...because, do you remember, we are sent just as the father had sent Jesus. In us is the breath of his "Receive the holy spirit..."

Who could ever take that from us?

Do you wake up in the mornings with this awareness that you are sent into this world with all its good and ugly sides, just as Jesus had been sent by his father?

Do you feel filled with the holy spirit when you brush your teeth, look in the mirror, prepare breakfast, make your plans for the day?

Do you regard what you do day in and day out as God's work?

And do you live your life in this wonderful knowledge that it is God who wants you to live?

Peace be with you...?!

Resurrection then and now must take place in the middle of everyday life.

Resurrection takes place, when an impossible situation is resolved, when a difficult conversation gets somewhere, when I can get rid of my inner tension or my fears or my weaknesses – all just because I know that the risen Christ is with me and wants me to follow him.

What fascinates me is the thought that through his resurrection, Jesus dwells in me. That through him we can become our true and what is even more our independent selves. That Jesus can fill us with the divine – “receive the holy spirit” – and thus lead us into unity with God.

If I take Jesus’ resurrection and his holy spirit breathed on me seriously, my main concern may well be, how Jesus can shape every moment of my everyday life. How I can grow closer towards the ways Jesus lived. How I can be shaped by the spirit of Jesus, when conflicts come up, when disappointment wears me out, when I feel misunderstood, lonely, hurt or even forsaken...

Can the spirit of resurrection shape me so that I don’t become bitter or hard, but can even face disappointment and rejection from an inner source of love? In a spirit of forgiveness?

Jesus even on the cross continued to love!

For me that is the biggest challenge of his death and resurrection.

And I would so much love to be able to make room in myself for the gentleness and mercy of Jesus rather than being haunted by bitterness, disappointment and fear.

I would so much love to be able to breathe in Jesus’ spirit and be filled by nothing else than his love.

And I only begin to understand through his cross and eternal life,  
how important it is,  
to not shut myself off because I find life is testing me too hard,

but be open to any experience of resurrection  
that may come along  
in form of a new friend, a song of love or in healing gentleness.

Jesus' resurrection is the promise that love drives out all fear,  
that his peace is with us,  
and that we can now and forever courageously open the locked doors  
behind which we used to hide  
and step out into the world  
that waits for us, because:  
Peace is with us.  
Amen.

#### **A statement of interdependence**

I do not stand alone  
but with others to support me  
I will stand my ground

I do not see the way  
but with others to walk with me  
I can make my path

I do not possess the truth  
but with others to witness to what they know  
I will be able to discern what is right

I cannot master all skills  
but with others who will lend their accomplishments  
I can do enough

I cannot carry every burden  
but with others to share it  
I may bear my own load

I cannot meet all needs  
but with others to nourish and replenish me  
I will be able to give enough

I do not have limitless choice  
but with others to consult  
I will make my own choices gladly

I will not always be consistent  
but with others to laugh with me  
I will regain my equanimity

I am not invincible  
but with others to reach out a hand  
I may learn from my mistakes and start again

I cannot be perfect  
but with others to make up the shortfall of my imperfections  
I can content to be good enough.  
Amen.