

“Uplifting”

John 3:16-17, 14:26, 20:19-22;
Matthew 10:32-33; Mark 8:38; Acts 5:27-32

Pastor James York

April 14, 2013

What is your biggest fear? Does your mind feed that fear with spiraling thoughts? The disciples were terrified. They just witnessed their, best friend, Lord and Savior Jesus, brutally crucified. They feared that they would be arrested, tortured, imprisoned and killed next. The report that Jesus is risen certainly produced joy and celebration but also fear and guilt for all of them disobeyed, denied, abandon, betrayed and deserted Jesus.

The gospel of John tells what happened on Monday the day after Easter. **John 20:19a “When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews,”** It is easy to miss or gloss over the fear, anguish and guilt when we are familiar with scripture. The four days since Jesus arrest and their betrayal were miserable. Fear filled days and tormented nights as their minds fed their fears. Kevin Powell suggests what might have been going through the fearful disciples minds as they cowered behind locked doors. ““Where were you when I needed you?” “You said you’d follow me anywhere, even to death. What happened with that?” “I made you a leader, but you turned out to be a coward.” “With friends like you ... I don’t need the Romans.” They might have remembered Jesus saying, **Matthew 10:32-33 “Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven”**. It gets worse. Jesus also said, **Mark 8:38 “Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels”**. Harsh words that I’m sure were swimming in the disciples’ ears. So they knew what to expect when Jesus caught up with them.” Kevin continues. “That’s what I’d expect if I were them because that’s probably what I would say if I were in Jesus’ position. ...When the crunch time came, and Jesus was arrested, they learned something about themselves. They learned that they were afraid—afraid of pain, afraid of prison, afraid of death. Afraid to actually trust God. ... It makes me think that news of Jesus’ resurrection was met with as much fear and trembling as joy and celebration. I wonder if they were in that locked room for a closed-door meeting to get their stories straight. What were they going to tell Jesus when he finally confronted them? What COULD they say? This is hard to spin. Betraying and abandoning the one they confessed as Lord cannot be presented as being a good thing. They were stuck. All they could do was wait for Jesus to show up and suffer the

consequences. But the locked door wasn't enough to keep Jesus out any more than a grave was. He simply appears right in front of them. And before anyone could say something, before they could come up with whatever lame excuse they had for their behavior, before they could even say "sorry" it's Jesus who speaks first. "Peace be with you." That's it ... the first words Jesus says to those who took off when things got tough. That's the first thing that Jesus says to those who said they didn't know him because it might have gotten them into trouble. That's the first thing he says to those whose familiar faces he was looking for as he hung dying in excruciating pain. "Peace be with you." No anger. No judgment. No harsh words. Just forgiveness. ...But that's how God works, isn't it? That's what God does. God forgives. God renews. Jesus wasn't the only one resurrected that day. His disciples were made new as well. They learned something new about God along the way. They learned that God can work with ANYONE to accomplish God's mission."

The gospel of John proclaims. **John 20:19-22** "When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After Jesus said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When Jesus had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

Our English word peace is a very weak translation of Jesus word shalom. Shalom is a wonderful word with abundant blessings that recurs throughout scripture. Shalom is complete wholeness, healing, harmony and tranquility both within a person and between all people, God and all of creation. Shalom is complete and perfect love and joy. Shalom is the opposite of fear. My understanding is shalom is the grandest Divine blessing you can hope for another or yourself.

The disciples cowered in fear. Jesus no longer restricted by physical limitations, the Risen Lord, suddenly appears within the locked room and greets the disciples, saying, "Shalom be with you"

Jesus breathing on the disciples may seem strange unless you make the connections with the life giving power of God's breath. In Genesis God breathed over the dark chaos to create light, order and all of creation. Jesus breathed on the disciples to disperse their fear and restore their goodness. God breathed into the earthen pottery, God formed from the dirt, to create humankind, to create us, to fill us with the image of God. God breathed on the disciples to renew their life, joy, love and uncover the image of God within them. God's breathe sustains and connects everyone together. Jesus breathed on the disciples to unite them, to make them the body of Christ, the church, to connect their gifts so they could go out and breathe shalom on all people. It is clear by the disciple's fearful failure that they are incapable of doing Jesus' commission so Jesus breathes on

them the renewing power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said. **John 14:26** “**The Holy Spirit will teach you everything and remind you of all that I have said to you.**”

Jesus said. **John 20:21b** “**as the father has sent me so I send you.**” **John 3:16** “**For God so loved the world that God gave God’s only son, so that everyone who believes in Jesus will not perish but have eternal life. God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world rather to save the world.**” This is Jesus commission to the disciples and us. Do not condemn rather save everyone with love, spread shalom and share the abundant life-giving breathe of God. Jesus calls us out of fear, renews our life, gives us a shalom that will uphold us through every situation, empowers us with the Holy Spirit and sends us to love all people.

Jesus’ shalom dispersed the disciple’s fears. Commissioned and empowered they boldly spread the Good News with extravagant love. The disciples persevered even when the first aspect of their fear became reality. They were imprisoned for following Jesus. **Acts 5:27-32** “**When the guards had brought the disciples, the guards had them stand before the council. The high priest questioned them, saying, "We gave you strict orders not to teach in Jesus name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you are determined to bring Jesus’ blood on us." But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than any human authority. The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted Jesus at God’s right hand as Leader and Savior that he might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Jesus."**

God helped the disciples break free from their fear, from prison and from the walls in their minds. The disciples embodied Jesus by their grace, love and compassion.

Sin makes us all fearful. Sin has imprisoned all of us. Anthony de Mello in *The Way To Love* says. “Do you see how you are in a prison created by the beliefs and traditions of your society and culture and by the ideas, prejudices, attachments and fears of your past experiences? Wall upon wall surrounds your prison cell so that it seems almost impossible that you will ever break out and make contact with the richness of life and love and freedom. ...

What can you do to break out? Four things: First, realize that you are surrounded by prison walls, that your mind has gone to sleep. It does not even occur to most people to see this, so they live and die as prison inmates.... You can only be a revolutionary when you see the prison walls in the first place.

Second, contemplate the walls. Spend hours just observing your ideas, your habits, your attachments and your fears. Without any judgment and condemnation. Look at them and they will crumble.

Third, spend some time [observing] the things and people around you. Look but really look as if for the very first time at the face of a friend, a leaf, a tree, a bird in flight, the behavior and mannerisms of the people around you. Really see them. ...

The fourth and most important step, sit down quietly and observe how your mind functions. There is a steady flow of thoughts and feelings and reactions there. Watch the whole of it for long stretch of time. The way you watch a river or a movie. You will soon find it so much more absorbing than any river or movie.... The unaware life, it is said, is not worth living. It cannot even be called life.””

God is eager to set you free. Fifty years ago on April 16, 1963 Martin Luther King Jr. issued his letter from the Birmingham Jail. I suspect he was also afraid. Certainly he was told to be separate, to stay on the outer side of the wall. Separation is sin. Yet God set Martin free to uplift people and recreate a more loving world.

The disciples decided to obey God rather than humans. A bold statement for them to make. How did they know they were hearing the voice of God? How did Martin know he was hearing the voice of God? Martin said a just law is “any law that uplifts human personality”. An unjust law is “Any law that degrades human personality.”

Notice the uplifting in our scripture. **Acts 5:31-32 “God exalted Jesus at God’s right hand as Leader and Savior [Uplifting] that Jesus might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. [Uplifting] And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit.”** Uplifting! In contrast Jesus was killed and buried clearly that degrades human personality.

Jesus gives us shalom to disperse our fears and commissions us to boldly love, to uplift all people. Martin said. “The church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state. It must be the guide and the critic of the state, and never its tool. If the church does not recapture its prophetic zeal, it will become an irrelevant social club without moral or spiritual authority.”

Martin said. “We are called to play the Good Samaritan on life's roadside, but that will be only an initial act. One day the whole Jericho road must be transformed so that men and women will not be beaten and robbed as they make their journey through life. True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar; it understands that an edifice that produces beggars needs restructuring.”

Whatever your fear Jesus is giving you shalom to overcome. Whatever your imprisonment Jesus is working to set you free. Whatever your chaos Jesus is breathing order into you. Whatever your weakness Jesus is empowering you with the Holy Spirit. Jesus has commissioned all of us to go out to unite and uplift everyone with love. Do that which fills you with shalom. Be grateful for experiences with our risen Lord. Be bold in proclaiming resurrection. Amen