

## **“Resurrection: From Fear to Peace”**

**John 20:19-31 and 1 Peter 1:3-9**

**Pastor James York**

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### **Scripture Readings**

#### **NRS John 20:19-31**

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 he 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 he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

**NRS 1 Peter 1:3-9** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By God's great mercy God has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith--being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire-- may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Although you have not seen Jesus, you love him; and even though you do not see Jesus now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

## **“Resurrection: From Fear to Peace”**

When I was 16 years, 2 months and a few days old I thought I was invincible. I had just completed evening farm chores and was hurrying to meet up with some friends to celebrate the last day of school. As I was leaving mom went over curfew, the rules, safe driving and an extra warning that the township had just put down new ungraded gravel so keep the speed down as the loose gravel will pull your car all over the road. She went on with loose gravel instructions but I never really heard them for over confident I said, "I know, I know. I will be safe." After all I thought, I have been driving tractor since I was 8. I had pulled thousands of wagons with precision just a few

inches from the blower, stopping at just the right spot. I could drive across a field in forward or reverse in a straight line keeping the proper spacing from the previous pass while adjusting all the controls and eating a sandwich. I could back up a 4 wheeled wagon around a corner into the barn with just 6 inches to spare on both sides. I had placed in the FFA tractor driving obstacle course competition. Since I was twelve I saved almost every penny and just two months earlier purchased my first car. I got my drivers license on my birthday. The driving test was so easy. What no obstacle course. After a few minutes the tester said I can see you are a skilled driver, cut the test short and gave me my license. A few years earlier I often watched the TV show Dukes of Hazard so clearly there was nothing a good farm boy cannot do in a car. Except that tractors do not go over 25 mph. Tractors are heavy with big tires and do not slid around. I had never driven a car in loose gravel. I should have carefully listened to my mom's instruction. Instead I speeded off down the road, inattentive, with the radio blaring. As soon as I hit the loose gravel about 8 inches deep I was in trouble. The car fish tailed. The road had a high crown and the gravel had not yet been spread to the sides so I fought the wheel back and forth trying to keep the car on the road. The back wheels went off the road so the car was now sliding sideways until I hit a huge concrete convert that smashed in the entire side of the car and bounced me back up on the road where I came to a stop. The car was undriveable. However I did not have a single scratch. Maybe it was my skill, maybe luck, maybe it was God that caused the car to bounce back up onto the road instead of flip into the river below. I was trembling in fear for suddenly I realized how serious the accident could have been if I had landed in the river. Shaking I walked the mile home. Thinking about how expensive it would be to fix the car, how much trouble I was in, my parents would never trust me again, my mom would lecture, I warned you about the gravel, I told you so. In fear I went to dad in the barn first. I expected discipline, instead I got peace. Dad listened then said I am glad you are alright. I was relieved but even more fearful to talk to mom. Amazingly she also listened, hugged me then said I am so glad you are all right cars can be fixed or replaced but you can't be. There was also justice, as it took me all summer to earn enough money to pay back my parents with interest for fixing the car, yet my parents never brought up my foolish, avoidable accident again.

The disciples thought they were invincible. With Jesus they had fed thousands, calmed storms, healed hundreds even brought a few people back to life. Clearly there was truly nothing that Jesus couldn't do. Then came the crucifixion, fear and death overwhelmed them. They tried to think back to all those times when Jesus foretold his death and resurrection. They wished they had listened closer. When would be the resurrection? What were they suppose to do? Then they heard about Jesus' resurrection. They were glad yet even more afraid for they all had betrayed Jesus.

Laurel A. Dykstra writes, "When Jesus appeared to his disciples, they were hiding upstairs in a locked room – the friends who knew him best, who had betrayed him, who had pretended they didn't know him, who had run away when he was dying, who hid when he was arrested, who were frightened and ashamed. He appeared among them and greeted them. Jesus didn't say, "What happened?" "Where were you?" "You screwed up." Jesus greeted them saying, "Peace." No matter who you are, no matter what you've done or think you've done, whoever you have betrayed or let down, no matter how far you have gone from God, from Jesus, Jesus doesn't say to you, "Where were you? You screwed up." Jesus greets you saying, "Peace." You are not accused, you are invited."

Henri Nouwen said that "perhaps the greatest challenge of the Gospel is not in putting into human language the Divine truth of Resurrection, but something more fundamentally human. It lies precisely in the invitation to accept a gift for which we can give nothing in return. How can this new mix of life and death that is Jesus himself be rationally conveyed?"

The rabbis traditionally hinted that God's message would always be paradoxical. They spoke of God's conferring justice and mercy on the world as "like a king with empty containers."

He said: "If I put hot water into them they will crack; if I put icy water into them they will contract." So what did the king do? He mixed the hot with the cold and poured the mixture into the containers, and they endured. Similarly, God said: "If I create the world with only the attribute of mercy, people will feel free to sin as much as they want. But if I create it with only the attribute of strict justice, how could the world survive? Behold, I will create it with both attributes. Would that it might endure!" Jesus' life and death convey to the disciples both God's mercy and a just vindication that they will now only begin to understand. In that room into which Jesus comes, the only thing the disciples have to give the Resurrected Lord in return is their acceptance of the gift."

Rather than understanding the gracious peace Jesus gives and the Resurrection, we need to experience it. So how do we? Paul Tillich said that "if he were asked to summarize the Christian message it would come down to two words: New Being. And then Tillich went on to say that the New Being in Jesus comes about in three ways. Call them The Three R's.

**Re-conciliation.** This is the reversal of hostility. It is the giving of peace by one party to the other, and vice versa. It is the overcoming of estrangement by love. This is the first task of the Risen Lord with his community of "former" believers: To break down the chasm between guilt and grace. To forgive. To end the exile. To confer acceptance even in the face of clear unacceptability.

**Re-union.** This is the acceptance of re-conciliation. Grace has been operative through Jesus all along; however, grace does not become a living reality until it is accepted by the disciples. Re-uniting means mutuality. A giving and receiving, a receiving and a giving occurs, and this completes the re-conciliation process.

**Re-surrection.** This is not just dead bodies coming out of the grave. Rather, it is the life of God – the power of the Holy Spirit – breathed into the witnessing community by Jesus. It is a process of continual rebirth and renewal. The never-ending call to personhood. It entails taking on a new identity in Christ, being willing to have a new orientation brimming with Spirit-led possibilities."

All of us have been careless, ignored Jesus' advice and have inattentively lived our life our own way. At times our life will be a wreck, everything will fall apart and we will be left shaking in fear. No matter where we run, no matter what we do, no matter how we hide Jesus will always be right there with us. Jesus will never say, "I told you so" or "you're not good enough" or "shape up get your life in order" or "you are unlovable". Jesus will never say you are not worth the betrayal, beatings and agony of the crucifixion. Jesus would have willingly died just for you alone.

Jesus says, "peace be with you". In God's grace none of us have anything to fear for Jesus has fulfilled justice for you. Jesus has made amends for every unlovable action you have, are or will ever commit. Jesus says, "peace be with you" let go of your fear, guilt and anxiety and accept Jesus' gift of peace, accept the renewing, perfecting, invigorating breath of the Holy Spirit, accept resurrection, abundant life today and eternal heavenly life in the future. No matter what you do, God will fix the world, even your life. God's biggest concern is you, that you sense God's love for you. God longs for you to accept Jesus' peace filled love and love God back. Amen.