April 16, 2023

The gospel reading for the Second Sunday after Easter is St. John 20:19-31, in which we read Jesus greets his disciples, **“Peace be with you”.** This was a common greeting and probably one Jesus had spoken to them many times. But in this situation, it was more than a greeting. It was a message! Jesus suddenly appeared in the room when all the doors were locked. The disciples had already been plenty jumpy over what the Jewish leaders might do to them. That’s why the doors were locked in the first place. Suddenly Jesus appears and they are scared out of their wits. What does Jesus do? He calms their fears. “Peace be with you.” That was certainly something they needed. “God has not given us the spirit of fear but of love and of power and of a sound mind.” Fear has tormented and these disciples were being tormented by thoughts and vain imaginations.

Have you ever been fearful of what might happen next in your life? In recent months I have had times when I would suddenly feel my gut tighten with fear. I couldn’t even associate it with an event. But I did know where it was coming from. “God has not given us the spirit of fear...” That’s what the devil wants to give us. And it is a spirit we are authorized to resist. What a strange thing is happening in that room. The Prince of Peace has come to them and they are afraid. He is the very one who can calm all their fears. He is the one who had told them before his death, (John 14:27) “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives.

Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid”. But here they are very afraid. He proves to them that he is not a spirit, not a ghost. He shows them his hands and side. They see clearly that this is indeed the resurrected Christ. At that moment of revelation their fears are gone. Their sorrow is turned to joy. Their hopes are revived. Isn’t it amazing how the presence of Jesus can turn our world around? Maybe I shouldn’t put it that way exactly. Since Jesus said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” maybe I should say it this way. Their awakening to his presence is what turned their world around. Are you aware of his presence in your life today? Are you mindful of him as you go through your daily duties at work?

We may discover more peace in our lives if we learn to nurture our awareness of his presence. The more we partner with him during the day, the more we commune with him in our spirit, the more we depend upon him for guidance and strength, the more conscious we become of his presence with us.

Jesus says to his followers, “Peace be with you.” That is a powerful revelation of his heart toward us. Think about the way these disciples have been behaving. One had betrayed Jesus. He is really in an altogether different category than the others. His was not a failure but a willful act of betrayal. But what would you say to the people gathered in this upper room in the light of what has recently happened?

Jesus had a close connection with the twelve disciples for three years. He had cared for them and taught them. When they found themselves perishing on an angry sea, Jesus came and rescued them. They had told Jesus how much they loved him and would even die for him. But then when the pressure got on, they wouldn’t even pray with Jesus. Jesus asked them to pray with him but instead they slept. When the authorities came to arrest Jesus, he made sure they were safe and not arrested.

Jesus was about to be brutally beaten and crucified. One of the disciples betrayed him. One other disciple openly denies even knowing him as Jesus foretold. All other disciples have run away and left him to deal with the problem alone. How would you feel about friends like that? In spite of the desecration of the disciples, after Jesus victory over the death his first words of greetings to the disciples are, “Peace be with you”? If you would like to know more about what is the peace that Jesus is giving us, please join us in our worship on Sunday at 11:00 AM.

Peace!

Rev. Dr. Christopher Ponnuraj

Minister

West Center Congregational Church