

**JOHN 20:19-31**

**April 8, 2018**

**FROM FEAR TO PEACE**

**BEFORE LOOKING AT TODAY'S SCRIPTURE, LET'S GO BACK A FEW VERSES AND PLACE IT INTO THE CONTEXT OF WHAT PRECEDED.**

**JOHN TELLS US THAT ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK JESUS APPEARED TO MARY MAGDALENE AND COMMANDS HER TO PROCLAIM THE RESURRECTION.**

**MARY DOES JUST THAT, FINDING THE APOSTLES AND DECLARING, *"I HAVE SEEN THE LORD."***

**HOWEVER, THE APOSTLES HEAR THIS NEWS DIFFERENTLY THAN ONE MIGHT EXPECT.**

**THEY DON'T TAKE UP THE MANTLE OF JESUS AND BEGIN PROCLAIMING THE NEWS OF THE RISEN LORD.**

**THEY DON'T BEGIN TO TELL OTHERS OF THE ABUNDANT LIFE AND OF A WORLD FOREVER CHANGED AND FILLED WITH HOPE.**

**THEY DON'T EVEN SEARCH FOR JESUS THAT THEY MIGHT TOO DECLARE, *"I HAVE SEEN THE LORD."***

**AND HERE IS WHERE WE PICK UP THE STORY TODAY. JOHN 20:19 TELLS US THAT WHAT THE DISCIPLES DID WAS TO RETURN TO THE HOUSE WHERE THEY HAD BEEN STAYING AND LOCKED THE DOORS FOR FEAR OF THE JEWS.**

**WE DON'T KNOW EXACTLY WHAT THAT FEAR MIGHT BE BUT WE CAN IMAGINE THAT THE FEAR RESTS IN THE COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO FINDING OUT THAT THEIR PLAN TO KILL JESUS DID NOT WORK.**

**IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT THEIR FEAR RESTED WITH THE UNKNOWN NEXT STEPS THAT GOVERNING BODY MIGHT TAKE WHEN JESUS WAS DISCOVERED ALIVE AND A FEAR THAT THIS TIME IT MIGHT INCLUDE THEM.**

**THE DISCIPLES HAD WITNESSED ALL THAT OCCURRED DURING THE TRIAL AND CRUCIFIXION OF CHRIST.**

**THEY WITNESSED THE LENGTHS TO WHICH THE SANHEDRIN WOULD GO TO ENSURE THAT JESUS WOULD NO LONGER BE REINTERPRETING THE LAW THAT THE GOVERNING BODY HELD SO DEAR.**

**THE DISCIPLES WERE AWARE THAT THEY WERE IDENTIFIABLE AS FOLLOWERS OF JESUS BUT THEY ALSO KNEW THAT THEY, THE DISCIPLES, HAD NOT REMAINED FAITHFUL AND DEFENDED JESUS WHEN THE TRIALS AND ALL THAT FOLLOWED WAS OCCURRING.**

**FOR THE DISCIPLES ANY JOY THEY MAY HAVE FELT ABOUT BEING TOLD THAT JESUS WAS ALIVE WAS OVER- SHADOWED BY THE FEAR THEY FELT ABOUT WHAT WOULD HAPPEN NEXT.**

**AND SO, WHAT SEEMS LIKE AN INCREDULOUS RESPONSE BECOMES EASIER TO UNDERSTAND AS WE THINK ABOUT THE WHOLE OF THEIR WORLD THAT DAY.**

**I KNOW THAT I CAN RELATE TO THAT FEAR WHICH PLACES ONE BEHIND CLOSED DOORS AND IN A BOX.**

**MANY YEARS AGO, I ENROLLED IN A PROGRAM AT COLUMBIA PRESBYTERIAN SEMINARY IN ATLANTA GEORGIA FOR A CERTIFICATE IN SPIRITUAL FORMATION.**

**I HAD BEGUN MY COURSE WORK BY TAKING A COUPLE OF CLASSES AWAY FROM CAMPUS BUT NOW WAS ENROLLED IN MY FIRST CLASS ON CAMPUS.**

**THE PROGRAM WAS DESIGNED AS WEEKLONG CLASSES THAT RAN FROM SUNDAY NIGHT UNTIL FRIDAY NOON SO THAT PASTORS WHO WERE PARTICIPATING COULD ATTEND WITHOUT MISSING A SUNDAY.**

**HOWEVER, FLIGHT COSTS FOR ME WERE SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCED BY FLYING IN ON SATURDAY NIGHT INSTEAD OF SUNDAY.**

**THE SEMINARY WAS ACCOMMODATING AND SAID THAT WHILE THE DORM WOULD NOT BE OPEN, THEY COULD GIVE ME AN ACCESS CODE AND PLACE MY ROOM KEY IN THE CREDENZA IN THE LOBBY.**

**I WAS TRULY EXCITED ABOUT THE PROSPECT OF ARRIVING EARLY.**

**I ENVISIONED HAVING TIME TO WALK AROUND AND FAMILIARIZE MYSELF WITH THE CAMPUS, DISCOVERING HIDDEN SECRETS ABOUT IT.**

**THERE WAS A CHURCH RIGHT AT THE ENTRANCE TO CAMPUS AND I LOOKED FORWARD TO WORSHIPPING THERE ON SUNDAY MORNING.**

**I EMBARKED ON THIS TRIP LOOKING FORWARD TO THE BREATHING SPACE BETWEEN MY ARRIVAL AND THE BEGINNING OF THE COURSE.**

**I ARRIVED AT THE DORM AT ABOUT 10:30 PM WITH THE DRIVER WAITING TO MAKE SURE THE ACCESS CODE WORK AND THAT I WAS SUCCESSFULLY INSIDE.**

**I THANKED HIM AND SENT HIM ON HIS WAY.**

**HOWEVER, WHEN I WENT TO THE CREDENZA THERE WAS NO KEY INSIDE THE DRAWER.**

**I SEARCHED THE DRAWER METICULOUSLY AS WELL AS ANY NEARBY DRAWERS, ALL TO NO AVAIL.**

**I PULLED OUT AND REREAD THE EMAIL I HAD BEEN SENT TO BE SURE THAT I HAD NOT MISUNDERSTOOD THE DIRECTIONS.**

**FINALLY, I NOTICED A SIGN THAT SAID IN CASE OF A PROBLEM CONTACT THE CAMPUS SECURITY.**

**I DECIDED THAT MY SITUATION FIT THE DEFINITION AND SO I DIALED THE NUMBER.**

**THEY WERE ACCOMMODATING AND CAME TO THE FACILITY AND SAID THEY COULD USE A MASTER KEY AND GET ME INTO A ROOM FOR THE NIGHT.**

**WHILE I WAS GLAD TO HAVE A PLACE TO SLEEP, I FOUND THAT MY JOY WAS REPLACED WITH SADNESS.**

**THE DAY I HAD PLANNED WAS NO LONGER POSSIBLE BECAUSE I DID NOT HAVE A KEY TO THE ROOM AND LEAVING MEANT LEAVING MY THINGS IN A LOCKED SPACE.**

**THIS FEELING INTENSIFIED WHEN THE DAWN CAME AS NOW I WAS ALSO GREETED BY POURING RAIN.**

**NOW THERE WAS TO BE NO WALK AROUND CAMPUS, NO VISIT TO THE CORNER CHURCH, NO FOOD TO BE HAD.**

**AS THE MORNING WENT ON I FOUND THAT MY SADNESS TURNED TO FEAR - FEAR THAT I ALSO WOULDN'T LIKE THE COURSE OR THE PEOPLE - FEAR THAT I WOULDN'T EVEN KNOW WHEN IT BEGAN SINCE I WAS IMPRISONED IN THIS BOX, BOTH PHYSICALLY AND EMOTIONALLY.**

**YES, I, TOO, LIKE THE DISCIPLES, EXPERIENCED THAT FEAR THAT BOXES ONE IN BEHIND LOCKED DOORS.**

**GETTING BACK TO OUR SCRIPTURE LESSON, WE LEARN THAT WHAT OCCURRED FOR THE DISCIPLES IS THAT JESUS CAME TO THEM WHERE THEY WERE.**

**HE CAME BEHIND THOSE CLOSED DOORS WHERE THEY WERE HIDING.**

**HE OFFERED TO THEM PEACE AND EVIDENCE OF HIS BEING BY SHOWING THEM THE SCARS FROM THE CRUCIFIXION.**

**HIS PRESENCE BROUGHT THEM NOT ONLY PEACE BUT ALSO JOY.**

**AND WITH THAT PEACE AND JOY JESUS COULD COMMAND THEM TO TAKE WHAT THEY HAD LEARNED AND GO FORWARD, SHARING THEIR KNOWLEDGE OF HIM AND HIS MINISTRY.**

**THEY COULD CONTINUE THE WORK HE HAD BEGUN IN HIS NAME.**

**JESUS ALSO CAME TO ME ON THAT DAY WHEN I WAS LOCKED BEHIND A CLOSED DOOR.**

**HE OFFERED ME COURAGE AND WITH THAT COURAGE I PLACED A TENNIS SHOE IN THE DOOR AND VENTURED OUT.**

**I DISCOVERED A WONDERFUL LIBRARY WITH WING BACKED CHAIRS AND A FIREPLACE, GENTLY WARMING THE SPACE AROUND IT.**

**ON THE COUNTER OF THE BOOKSHELF WAS A SMALL BOOK ENTITLED BE STILL.**

**INSIDE IT WAS A WONDERFUL REFLECTION ON BEING PRESENT WITH GOD AND EXQUISITE PHOTOS ACCOMPANYING THE WORDS.**

**JESUS BREATHED PEACE ON ME.**

**I LEFT BEHIND THE FEARS THAT HAD INVADED AND SPENT THE TIME LEFT BEFORE THE COURSE, REFLECTING ON WHAT HAD OCCURRED.**

**I USED THE NEW METHOD OF REFLECTION TO GAIN NEW INSIGHTS INTO THE SCRIPTURES AND EVENTUALLY SHARED THESE NEW LEARNED SKILLS WITH OTHERS.**

**JUST AS HE HAD DONE WITH THE DISCIPLES, JESUS CAME TO ME IN ALL MY HUMANNESS AND PROVIDED ME WITH A PEACE AND JOY THAT SENT ME OUT TO SHARE WHAT HAD OCCURRED IN MY LIFE WHEN I ENCOUNTERED HIM.**

**THERE IS STILL ANOTHER PART OF OUR SCRIPTURE LESSON TODAY.**

**JOHN TELLS US THAT THOMAS WAS NOT WITH THE DISCIPLES BEHIND THOSE CLOSED DOORS.**

**WHEN THOMAS AND THE DISCIPLES REUNITE THEY SHARE WITH HIM THAT THEY HAVE SEEN JESUS AND WHAT JESUS HAS SAID TO THEM.**

**IN ALL HIS HUMANITY THOMAS REACTS WITH DISBELIEF AND DECLARES THAT UNLESS HE CAN SEE AND TOUCH THE HOLES LEFT BY THE NAILS IN JESUS' HAND AND SIDES, HE, THOMAS, WILL NOT BELIEVE.**

**A WEEK LATER THAT OPPORTUNITY OCCURS WHEN AGAIN JESUS COMES TO THEM BEHIND CLOSED DOORS, OFFERING FIRST PEACE TO THE DISCIPLES.**

**JESUS THEN OFFERS TO THOMAS THAT WHICH HE NEEDS.**

**HE INVITES THOMAS TO PLACE HIS HANDS INTO HIS SIDE AND SAYS, *"DO NOT DOUBT BUT BELIEVE."***

**JESUS HAS GIVEN THOMAS THAT WHICH HE NEEDS AND THOMAS RESPONDS WITH “*MY LORD AND MY GOD.*”**

**BUT JESUS DOESN'T STOP THERE.**

**HE ACKNOWLEDGES THOMAS' BELIEF BUT BLESSES ALSO THOSE WHO DID NOT SEE BUT HAVE COME TO BELIEVE.**

**JESUS SPOKE THEN TO EACH OF US.**

**WITH THESE PASSAGES OF SCRIPTURE, WE ARE REASSURED THAT WHEREVER WE ARE, JESUS COMES TO US.**

**WE DON'T HAVE TO HIDE BEHIND OUR FEARS, AND STAY BEHIND LOCKED DOORS.**

**WE DON'T HAVE TO FEAR JUDGMENT ABOUT OUR DOUBTS BECAUSE JESUS SAYS TO US AS TO THOMAS, “*DO NOT DOUBT BUT BELIEVE.*”**

**HE GIVES TO THOMAS THAT WHICH THOMAS NEEDED TO GET BEYOND HIS DOUBTS.**

**JESUS GIVES THAT ALSO TO US.**

**AND ON THIS SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER WITH THE LILIES GONE AND THE GUESTS HAVING RETURNED HOME, WITH LIFE HAVING RETURNED TO ROUTINE, WHAT IS IT THAT WOULD PROMPT YOU TO PROFESS, “*MY LORD AND MY GOD*”?**

**ARE THERE QUESTIONS YOU HAVE THAT KEEP YOU BEHIND LOCKED DOORS BECAUSE YOU LIKE THOMAS NEED TO SEE?**

**OR, ARE YOU WISHING FOR SOMEONE TO HOLD ONTO YOU WHILE YOU STRUGGLE IN YOUR FAITH OR LIFE?**

**IN YOUR BULLETIN YOU WILL FIND A 3X5 CARD. JOT DOWN ON YOUR CARD QUESTIONS WITH WHICH YOU STRUGGLE AND NEED TO “SEE” MORE CLEARLY.**

**AT THE END OF THE REFLECTION TIME, A BASKET WILL GO THROUGH EACH SIDE OF THE SANCTUARY WHERE YOU CAN PLACE YOUR QUESTIONS; NO NAMES ARE NEEDED.**

**IN THE COMING WEEKS I INVITE YOU TO JOIN EMMA SUE DAVENPORT AND ME AS WE FACILITATE DISCUSSIONS THAT LOOK AT THOSE QUESTIONS AND OTHERS THAT MAY ARISE.**

**DETAILS ABOUT TIME AND LOCATION CAN BE FOUND IN TODAY'S BULLETIN.**

**LET US JOIN TOGETHER AS THE BODY OF CHRIST IN CARRYING FORWARD THE EASTER CELEBRATION, BY REMOVING THOSE OBSTACLES WHICH PREVENT US FROM THAT DECLARATION EVERY DAY OF OUR LIVES.**

**THESE VERSES OF SCRIPTURE HAVE IDENTIFIED OUR HUMANITY AND THE EASE WITH WHICH WE GO BEHIND CLOSED DOORS.**

**IT HAS ALSO ASSURED US THAT JESUS KNOWS THAT ABOUT US AND IS WILLING TO MEET US WHEREVER WE FIND OURSELVES AND IN THAT MEETING, OFFERS PEACE, A PEACE THAT PROHIBITS OUR REMAINING SILENT ABOUT OUR EXPERIENCE WITH HIM.**

**AMEN.**

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