

Squamish United Church
Rev. Karen Millard
Easter 2 (online worship)

April 19, 2020

Scriptures:

John 20:19-22

Psalm 16:5-11

It may feel odd to have moved into the season of Easter, a season of celebration, in the midst of these difficult times. Perhaps it is an opportunity to really take into consideration that, at the heart of our faith, we are called to live our lives in the belief that death is not the final word. This is why Christians are called "Easter People." The tomb becomes the womb of new life. How would we live differently if we really believe in love above all possible endings? What if we lived as if there was nothing to fear?

Every year on the Sunday after Easter we hear the scriptures of the disciples locked in a room fearing for their lives. Sound familiar? This year more than ever before as I hear Jesus enter the room his words bring the comfort I need. "Peace be with you." Jesus says Let's let Jesus speak these words to us as well. Here is how the story from the Gospel of John goes:

"It was still the first day of the week. That evening, while the disciples were behind closed doors because they were afraid... Jesus came and stood among them. He said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. When the disciples saw the Lord, they were filled with joy. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As [Abba, God] sent me, so I am sending you." Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." - John 20: 19-22

Two things Jesus wanted the disciples to have in their moment of fear was peace and the Spirit. Jesus wanted them to take his breath so that they would feel his spirit living in them. Peace and the Spirit.

I don't think I have ever noticed before but this event when the disciples are hiding away is still on the first day of the week. So much happened from sunrise to evening on that day.

We get to linger in the story and we drag it out over weeks. But all of this happened in one day.

Many of us have felt that kind of rush of events these last few weeks. Although many of us are isolated away the last six weeks have been so packed full of a rollercoaster of events and emotions that I am shocked it is only mid April.

On this Easter day in the scripture.

A mourning Mary discovers an empty tomb and in her confusion she runs back and reports this news to Peter and the other, disciple whom Jesus loved; and a new scene emerges as the next

group race to the tomb, entering the space to find the linen that wrapped the body of Jesus, but, as Mary had already told them there was no body.

So a group of disciples gathered. They are still unsure, their hopes are dashed, they know Jesus said death would not win and love would overcome but they are still not sure what the empty tomb means. They are fearful.

Because good news does not erase fear. Good news, incredible news, can bring hope, but even hope does not eliminate genuine fear.

So, there they were isolated together in unfamiliar fear.

We know isolation and unfamiliar fear this year in a way many of us have not known before. It is the Easter season and we are supposed to be filled with hope and usually our services are so joyful and exuberant but why is it that this year the story can't just seem to shake us into a new season?

For the disciples on that day an empty tomb wasn't enough to confirm all that Jesus promised is true. They still weren't sure what the resurrection even meant.

They and we come to know but on that day it still wasn't clear. And maybe for us this day we need to be reminded ever so boldly what Resurrection means.

Resurrection means God still shows up.

That is the story they are locked behind closed doors in their fear and what happens? Jesus shows up. Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."

They knew it was Jesus because they recognized the scars. And in recognition, John says they rejoiced. God is (still) with us! And Jesus, breathed on the disciples much like God breathed life into the first humans, Which brings us to the rest of the story.

Thanks be to God that no matter how much chaos there is in the world, and no matter where or how or even if we mark the day, Easter happens. Life flourishes in the face of death, and we are offered resurrection hope.

I am especially struck this year by the arrival of resurrection hope for Jesus' first friends and followers: because they do not all believe and receive comfort at once in equal measure, but rather in waves. Their faith, their doubt, their trust, their certainty, their worries - they come and they go for each at different times.

The trajectory of moving from grief to hope is different among all the disciples, just as it is for us.

Maybe you are like Mary: vigilant, attuned to the voice of God, and ready to testify to the presence of the risen Saviour.

Maybe you are like the disciples, navigating fear and belief, joy and isolation, all at once, and drawing strength from your friends.

Or maybe you are like Thomas: unwilling or unable to witness to Jesus' resurrection until your fingers can trace the scars of his death.

Thomas doesn't doubt as much as he demands. He demands that Jesus show up for him, just like Jesus showed up for the other disciples. He demands that Jesus be present with him, too, so that the wave of resurrection hope may wash over him.

He knows what it will take for him to believe this inexplicable news. Thomas needs to understand Jesus' resurrection not just in his brain but in his body, with his senses, his whole self.

Oh I get you Thomas - I need to know things are OKAY before I change my fear to trust

When I hear Thomas' demand, the psalmist cries ring in my ears. I hear lament. I hear an expectation that God is alive, that God is powerful, that God cares for God's people. I hear a plea for God to show up again from someone who knows the many ways God has shown up for God's people in the past.

When I read this story this week I see the God that walks into our fears and breathes peace and hope into them.

Surrounded as we are by sickness, deprivation, fear, and death, we have plenty of things to lament. But we have also witnessed God's saving acts in the world throughout history. If we are willing to open our hearts and eyes we will also see them even today.

We have heard God call us to offer hope and life and love in the midst of this fear and devastation. It is time for us to cry out to the lord of Sea and Sky and if you are in fear hear God say I am here, peace be with you. It is time for us to cry and and say here I am what would you have me to do?

It is time for God to show up to our hurting, struggling, grieving, lonely world, and to allow Christ's resurrection hope wash over us all. That's the Heart of the Matter. And God may just need to show up through us. So let us live the resurrection hope today.

If you know someone who just might need to hear these words I want to encourage you to tell someone Peace be with you today. Maybe you need to say it to the person sitting next to you, or you need to text it, or phone someone but remind someone today that God's peace is being offered to them.

This week, since Jesus has said he wants us to feel peace, Think about what sights, sounds, words, and actions, (nature, birds, taking a walk,) are things that act in your life as a "voice in your ear" that says, "Peace be with you."

Pause and ponder when have you felt peace this week?

if you haven't experienced much peace,
what do you have in your memory as something that brings you peace?
Ponder those things as you listen or sing with us