

Sermon Notes - John 20:19-31

April 19, 2020

How many times have you ever said or had it said to you, "I told you so!"? You know when you ask someone for advice and then you ignore it and get into trouble and the one who gave you advice says, "I told you so - you should have listened to me."

In the 70's, there was a mayor in Fudai, Japan who wanted his city to build a 12-foot wall around the city to protect it from a tsunami. Everyone thought the mayor was crazy; they had not had a tsunami in many, many years. Well, he persisted; the city raised the money and it took ten years to finance and build that wall. The mayor died right after the wall was completed. A couple of years later, there was a tsunami that hit the northeast corner of Japan and lots of lives were lost and much damage occurred. But, guess what town had little to no damage and no loss of life? Fudai, Japan. After the storm, people in the town went to the former mayor's gravesite and told his family how grateful they were that he convinced them to build that 12-foot tsunami wall. I wonder if he were living then - would he have said, "I told you so?"

I wonder if Jesus wanted to say that to his disciples when he appeared to them in The Upper Room in Jerusalem - "I told you, guys, but you didn't believe me, did you? I told you that I would be arrested, crucified, and rise on the third day - how many times did I tell you?"

But notice, Jesus didn't say that to them according to our gospel lesson. He said, "Peace be to you" - - that was somewhat of a typical Hebrew greeting, but here it had more meaning. Jesus was saying to them - I bring you peace - trust me in your fears, concerns, and anxieties.

At the end of John 14, Jesus is recorded as saying to his disciples, "My peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you, not as the world gives, give I unto you." When Christ walks with us, along-side us, peace is with us. We are not alone and we can face anything with him. Our peace comes from the presence of the Risen Christ with us.

Did you notice in the gospel story, Jesus came to the disciples in their time of need - in their fear, confusion, and chaos? **He, also, comes to us in our times of need.**

Some of you have heard the name, John Madden. He was the former NFL football coach of the Oakland Raiders when they won the Super Bowl many years ago. He was also a TV sports commentator for many years. What you might not know about him was that he had an immense fear of flying. When he was a young coach, he went to fly out of state and they had machines in the airport where you put money in and buy flight insurance. He saw three airline pilots in the line in front of him buying insurance - he thought if these pilots are buying insurance, it must not be safe and from then on he would not fly anywhere. He traveled from coast to coast by car or bus, but never flew on an airplane again. That's quite a fear!

Most of us have some kind of fear - the fear of cancer, the fear of closed-in spaces, the fear of not having enough money to retire, the fear of losing your job, the fear of this coronavirus, etc.

Those disciples in The Upper Room were afraid that Jesus' enemies - the Jewish religious leaders or the Roman soldiers - might come to kill them, too. They were confused and not sure where to go or what to do now that their leader (Jesus) had died. They needed reassurance that they'd be okay. They needed to know Jesus was still with them.

Nothing is too difficult for Jesus - the Risen Christ appears to them behind locked doors. He let them see and touch his scars and later on the gospel says that he ate with them. **It wasn't Jesus' words, but His Presence that reassured them.**

Sometimes, we too just need to know that God is with us and we are not alone. As followers of Christ, sometimes we are called to walk alongside others and let them know they are not alone.

Elizabeth Kubler Ross, a hospital chaplain and author of the book, “On Death and Dying,” taught a seminary class on the subject of death and dying. One day in class, she showed the class a drawing of a young boy dying with terminal cancer in the hospital where she worked. It was a drawing of a cottage with a mother, father, two kids, trees, flowers, and sunshine. Off, to the other side of the drawing, was the little boy facing an army tanker about to run over him. The little boy doesn’t talk; he just draws pictures. She said to the class, “how would you comfort him and get him to talk about his fears?”

One seminarian drew a picture just like the little boy’s with a figure holding a stop sign in front of the tanker – no response from the boy. But another seminarian drew a picture just like the kid *except* he drew a figure standing beside the little boy holding his hand in front of the tanker. The little boy began to talk to that student; that kid just needed to know that he wasn’t alone – someone was with him facing his enemy cancer.

Further in our gospel lesson, it tells of Thomas, one of the Eleven who was not with the other disciples in that Upper Room when the resurrected Christ appeared to them. When they told Thomas later about seeing the resurrected Jesus (The Divine Jesus), he would not believe them. He said, “I’ll believe when I see his nail scarred hands and I put my hand in his nail-pierced side.” Jesus knows our thoughts and reads our hearts and even though He was not physically present when Thomas came back to be with the other disciples, he knew what Thomas had said. So, a day or so later, the Resurrected Jesus reappears again behind locked doors to those disciples and Thomas. Thomas sees and believes and worships Jesus. Jesus said, “Thomas, you have seen and touched and believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.”

Thomas was given the privilege to see and know the human Jesus and the Divine Resurrected Son of God. **Jesus was teaching the disciples that his presence from now on would be spiritual, not physical.** They saw him as human and divine, temporal and eternal, seen and unseen – He could appear and disappear, **but from now on his spiritual presence**

would always be with them – and with us. He said to them, “Receive now the Holy Spirit” – that is, his spiritual presence with us.

Jesus came at their points of need – in their fears, their confusions, their doubts, and He comes to us in our points of need. His presence is always with us. As the old hymn goes, “Because He lives, I can face tomorrow...”

He comes to bring us peace and calm in the storm and to give us hope, to reassure us that we are not alone – His presence is always with us.

Jerry Cook, in his book (“A Few Things I Learned When I Knew It All”), tells of recovering from heart bypass surgery and about a friend who was facing the same kind of surgery with much fear and anxiety. The friend came to see Jerry and asked about Jerry’s chest scar – “would it be okay if I see your scar?” Jerry unbuttoned his shirt, showed him his chest incision – the friend reached out and touched the scar. After a few minutes passed, he said to Jerry that the heart surgeon was going to take a vein out of his leg to put in his heart; “did they do that to you, too?” Jerry told him that they did. The friend said, “do you mind showing me your leg scar?” Jerry rolled up his pants to his knee and the friend reached out and touched the leg incision. After a few minutes, with tears in his eyes and in a soft voice, he said to Jerry, “I have hope now. If you can go through this and come out okay, I am hopeful. I can do that, too.”

Sometimes, Jesus comes to us even through others – to calm our fears and to give us hope and reassurance.

“Peace be with you,” Jesus said - my presence will be with you.

You and I can face today, tomorrow, and the next day because Christ is Risen! He won the victory of life over evil and sin and death. He came to bring us hope and peace and to remind us how much He loves us. Amen.