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Our Saviour Lutheran Church
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Easter 2

Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. Amen.

And they were in the house, practicing social distance, for fear of the coronavirus.

And Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."

PAUSE

Now, sisters and brothers in Christ, it might seem to us strange and uncanny.

It might even surprise us and appear peculiar to our ears.

It might seem to make no sense to us at all.

But the disciples we read in our gospel lesson today...

The disciples are hiding in a house.

PAUSE

It is evening on that first Easter.

And the Lord Jesus has been raised from the dead.

Jesus has conquered sin and death.

So what pray tell could the disciples possibly be fearing that would make them seek refuge in a house behind locked doors?

What could they be fearing?

Well, the text says that the disciples were in the house behind locked doors for fear of the Jews.

The disciples apparently were afraid that what had happened to Jesus—suffering, crucifixion, and death...

The disciples were afraid that what had happened to Jesus could happen to them as well.

The disciples were afraid of the Jews, such that the Jews would turn them in to the Roman authorities, as co-conspirators with Jesus.

The disciples were afraid and so they were hiding in a house behind locked doors.

But again, we have to wonder why the disciples would be afraid.

If Jesus had been raised...

If Jesus was victorious over sin and death...

What power would the Jews or the Roman authorities have that could match the power of the resurrected Lord?

Yes, we have to wonder why the disciples would be afraid?

Unless, unless the disciples were afraid of Jesus himself.

Do we see where I am going with this?

Maybe the disciples were afraid... of... Jesus.

Maybe we are still missing it, so let spell it out.

Maybe the disciples were afraid...of...Jesus, who when he was arrested, his disciples all scattered.

Ahh, I think I may need to break it down a little further for us.

Maybe the disciples were afraid of Jesus, whom the disciples had abandoned, whom the disciples had deserted, whom the disciples had denied even knowing.

Maybe the disciples were afraid because in the passage immediately preceding our Gospel reading today, the disciples were told by Mary that Jesus had been raised.

Maybe the disciples were afraid that the resurrected Jesus would be irate with them and would punish them for how they had treated him.

Yes, maybe the disciples were afraid because of Jesus.

And that...that is why when Jesus appears to his disciples on that evening of the first Easter...

That is why the very first words out of Jesus' mouth are "Peace be with you."

Jesus says these word to assure his disciples that he has not come back to punish the disciples.

No, there is no blaming from Jesus. There is no reprimanding from Jesus. There is only peace.

"Peace be with you," says Jesus.

PAUSE

And they were in the house, practicing social distance, for fear of the coronavirus.

And Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."

PAUSE

Now it amazes me...it amazes me just how debilitating fear can be in our lives.

Yes, fear can immobilize people.

Fear can cause people to close in upon themselves.

Fear can make people not want to leave the house, nor even get out of bed.

Fear is a terrible thing.

Fear can rob us of life.

It can steal from us any sense of hope.

Fear is the very worst of emotions.

And in the story of Jesus in the Bible, it is amazing how often fear is mentioned.

At the time of the annunciation, when an angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, the angel said to Mary, "Do not be AFRAID."

And when Joseph had decided to divorce his wife Mary because she was found to be pregnant, an angel then comes to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Do not be AFRAID to take Mary as your wife."

And in the story of Jesus's birth, when the angel stood before the shepherds, they were terrified, and the angel said to the shepherds, "Do not be AFRAID."

And when Jesus heals the demoniac in the region of the Gerasenes, and the people of the town come and see the man healed and in his right mind, the text says that they were AFRAID.

And when Jesus comes to the house of the synagogue leader to heal his daughter, Jesus tells the man, "Do not be AFRAID, but believe."

And when Jesus is in a boat with his disciples, and calms the storm, the disciples we are told were FEARFUL and amazed.

And on another occasion, when Jesus walks on the water, approaching the boat in which his disciples sailed, Jesus says, "Don't be AFRAID."

And when the three disciples—Peter, James, and John—went up on the mountain and Jesus was transfigured before them, a voice from heaven spoke, and when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces, for they were TERRIFIED.

And when Jesus tells his disciples that the Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of men. And that they will kill him, and after he is killed, he will rise three days later. The text says, “The disciples did not understand this, but they were AFRAID to ask him.”

And when Pilate is standing before the mob of Jews who are demanding that Jesus be crucified, we are told that Pilate was AFRAID.

Yes, fear overwhelms the narrative about Jesus.

Again and again we hear about this person or that who is afraid.

Again and again, we observe this person or that who is full of fear.

Fear overwhelms the narrative about Jesus.

And, fear invades our gospel story today.

The disciples are in a house behind locked doors because of fear.

PAUSE

And they were in the house, practicing social distance, for fear of the coronavirus.

And Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.”

PAUSE

Fear invades the story of Jesus.

And fear invades our story today.

Fear is humanity's go-to emotion.

When things aren't going as we had hoped...

When life is unraveling before us...

When the world around us isn't going according to plan...

Well, then anxiety sets in, fear sets in, and we become afraid.

Fear is humanity's go-to emotion.

The author of Genesis is even want to say that fear is inherent in humanity since the dawn of time.

Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and then they hid from God.

And when God calls out to them, saying "Where are you?"

They reply, "We heard your voice, and we were afraid, and so we hid."

Yes, fear is humanity's go-to emotion, since the very dawn of time.

Indeed, it is the unusual person who when everything around them begins to fall apart, can simply say, "c'est la vie."

It is the unusual person who can just let things roll off their shoulders.

It is the unusual person who doesn't let things bother them.

No, for most of us, when things go awry, we go into panic mode.

When things go amiss, we worry and fret and agonize.

When things go wrong, we become fearful and say to ourselves, "What am I going to do now?"

Fear is humanity's go-to emotion, and that is why so often in the story of Jesus, individuals are described as being afraid or full of fear.

It is who we are as human beings...we are people who become afraid.

Even Jesus in his humanity became distressed and horrified, and prayed to God in the Garden of Gethsemane that he might be spared his fate on the cross.

PAUSE

And they were in the house, practicing social distance, for fear of the coronavirus.

And Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."

PAUSE

And so today, amidst our fear and anxiety...

And so today when we are still under the governor's order to stay at home...

And so today we hear the words Jesus spoke to his disciples on that first Easter evening.

"Peace be with you."

Do not be afraid, or anxious, or worried.

Do not be immobilized. Do not be closed in on yourself.

Do not let fear rule your life.

This is what Jesus is telling the disciples in this passage.

Jesus recognizes his disciple's humanity.

He recognizes that they are human, and to be human is to experience fear.

And so Jesus does something bizarre; Jesus breathes on his disciples.

And Jesus tells those disciples, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

In essence, Jesus is re-creating his disciples here, breathing on them a new breath of life, as in the Garden of Eden when God breathed into Adam the breath of life.

In Jesus Christ, God is re-making his people.

Re-making us so that we need not be ruled by fear.

Re-making us into new creations.

"Peace be with you," Jesus says. "Peace...be with you."

In other words, Jesus is saying, "Let peace, not fear..."

Let peace, not anxiety nor worry...

Let peace govern your life, control your life, direct your life.

Cast out fear, and let peace have dominion over your life.

Peace...be with you.

Not fear, but peace be with you.

We are made new creations. Fear is humanity's go-to emotion, but not anymore.

Since we have been made new creations in Christ Jesus, as such, we are ruled by peace.

We have been re-made. We have had God's Holy Spirit breathed on us. We have received the Spirit of Christ forever.

PAUSE

And they were in the house, practicing social distance, for fear of the coronavirus.

And Jesus comes and Jesus stands among you now in your home, and Jesus says,
"Peace be with you."

Yes, peace...be with you, my Friends. May peace accompany you, and may fear
be a bygone word. Amen.