

## ECF 26<sup>th</sup> July 2020 John 20:19-23 Peace that Drives Out Fear

Last Friday was the 7<sup>th</sup> annual World Emoji Day, a day given to the “global celebration of emoji.” To mark the day, Twitter released a breakdown of the most used emojis on Irish Twitter since the start of this year. And it gives an interesting insight into some of the things that have been on people’s minds this year.

- Topping the list is the crying with laughter emoji, as people have sought to cheer each other up!
- Up next was the crying face emoji – not surprising in a year marked by so much loss, suffering and hardship.
- But the third most tweeted emoji, was the worried face, up this year by 415%. It shows that this has been a worrying time for many people.

And what have people been worried about? Well, there was a massive spike in the usage of the shopping trolley, the microbe and of course, the toilet roll.

Fear, worry and anxiety have been dominating many people’s thoughts this year. But of course, these emotions are not new. These are the kinds of things that many of us have to deal with regularly.

They were also dominating the thoughts of the disciples. They’d heard the reports of the empty tomb from the women and Peter and John. They’d also heard reports from Mary Magdalene, from Peter and from two on the road to Emmaus about meeting the Risen Lord. But still, that night, they were afraid, worried and confused.

But this was going to change with an amazing declaration of peace that drives out fear. John 20:19-23: “On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!”<sup>20</sup> After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

<sup>21</sup> Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”<sup>22</sup> And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”<sup>23</sup> If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

### 1. Our Fear Is Overcome

It is no wonder that the disciples huddled together “With the doors locked for fear of the Jews.” John 20:19 Their teacher, Lord and friend had been arrested, questioned, beaten, flogged, condemned and killed in the most brutal way. When he died, all their hopes and dreams had died with him.

#### a) Understandable Fear!

And it looked like that this had happened because one of their own community, Judas, had betrayed Jesus.

And if this was not bad enough, when this had happened, they had nearly all abandoned the one they’d committed their lives to follow. When Jesus was arrested, “All the disciples deserted him and fled.” Matthew 26:56.

And then when he was questioned by the Sanhedrin, Peter, the strongest and most vocal of their group, had crumpled under the pressure and denied knowing Jesus.

So when Jesus was suffering on the cross, only John stood there with his mother and the other faithful women. The rest were nowhere to be seen.

And to add to all of this, a few nights earlier Jesus had warned them that they would be hated, persecuted, excluded and executed because of their allegiance to him. “A time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God.” John 16:2

So no wonder they hid in fear behind locked doors. They didn’t know what was going to happen. They were afraid that the next knock of the door would be soldiers coming to wipe them out!

Can you relate to that kind of fear? There were many things in this world that make us afraid. Some of those fears are possibly out of proportion to the danger we are in. But many of them are realistic. It’s understandable that many people are worried about their health, their families, their finances, their security, their future.

And of course ultimately humanity has been impacted by one particular fear. Hebrews 2:15 speaks about “those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.”

## b) Unexplainable Peace

Worry and fear are understandable because we live in a dangerous world. And yet look at the first words of Jesus to his disciples here: [“Peace be with you!”](#) John 20:19

The common Jewish greeting was Shalom. It meant not just the absence of fear or stress but the presence of well-being in its fullest sense. It was a life filled with all the blessings of being part of the kingdom of God.

So this was a common greeting. But when Jesus declared peace that night, there was nothing common about it. It was so important that Jesus repeated it. See v21. And again a week later, see v26. That’s because real peace is the gift of the resurrected Christ!

### i) With God

Jesus died and rose again so we can have peace with God. Our sin made us enemies of God, separated from him and living in rebellion against his rule and reign.

But because of his amazing love and mercy, God sent his Son to the cross, to pay the price for our sins so we could be reconciled to him. [“The punishment that brought us peace was upon him.”](#) Isaiah 53:5

And so if we’ve trusted in Jesus, then we have been brought into peace with God. [“In Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.”](#) Ephesians 2:13 We are now forgiven, cleansed and adopted into his family!

### ii) With Others

And through this, he has also reconciled us with others. Talking about the conflict between Jew and Gentile, Paul wrote: [“He himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.”](#) Ephesians 2:14

There are many things that separate people - race, background, status, gender, achievements, mistakes. But through his death and resurrection, Jesus has removed those divisions. All of us who’ve trusted in him have been brought into one family, one community of his people, equally loved, equally valued, equally accepted, with equal access into his presence forever.

### iii) With Ourselves

And it is this that enables us to be at peace with ourselves. Experiencing peace with God and with others, brings harmony into our troubled hearts. Jesus promised: [“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.”](#) John 14:27

This doesn’t mean all our problems and challenges in this life have disappeared. But it means we can keep on giving them all into the hands of our Heavenly Father, knowing that he will always care for us, lead us, provide for us, support us and bring us safely home.

And so this peace comes from knowing that we’re accepted by God as we are. It means that we don’t need to hide our faults from each other and pretend to be someone else. And it means we can accept ourselves, knowing that we’re loved by God, valued by him and precious in his sight.

## 2. Our Faith is Restored

And it was the resurrection of Jesus that brought the disciples into this experience of real peace, because it restored their faith in him.

Their faith in who he is had taken a severe beating. When Jesus met the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, they said to him: [“We had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.”](#) Luke 24:21 They had trusted in Jesus as their Messiah, but his death seemed to be the end of all their hope in him.

And even after the events of that morning, they were still struggling to have faith.

### a) Convincing Proof

And so Jesus appeared to his disciples to restore their faith! [“After he said this, he showed them his hands and side.”](#) John 20:20.

Next week, we'll look at Thomas, who's often called doubting Thomas. But all the disciples struggled to believe in the resurrection. They all needed evidence to convince them of this truth.

So Jesus showed them his hands and side to prove his identity, and to prove that he was alive. His body was transformed, as he could enter a locked room – but he was still a physical human being. Luke also says that he ate some food to prove this.

The resurrection was not an idea hastily accepted by gullible men. It was not wishful thinking or mass hysteria. It was not a spiritual awakening. It was a historical, physical, examinable fact, proven by many pieces of evidence.

God isn't asking us to have blind faith – just close our eyes and believe. Instead he wants us to examine the evidence and put our faith in Jesus because we are convinced that he is the Son of God.

This is why John wrote his gospel. To provide the evidence so: **“that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”** John 20:31

### 3. Our Future is Transformed

And if we do this, then our future will be transformed. This is what happened to the disciples.

#### a) Sadness is replaced by Joy

Their sadness was replaced by joy: **“The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.”** John 20:20

In many ways, their situation was unchanged. Their lives were still in danger. Their enemies were still committed to destroy them. But the resurrection gave them a joy that nobody could take away!

- It meant that the cross was not a tragedy to mourn, but a victory to celebrate.
- It meant that Jesus was not gone, but he would always be with them.
- It meant that their hopes in him were not empty, but they could depend on him for everything that he'd promised.

And today, no matter what we're going through, we can also rejoice. Because Jesus is alive, it means that

- Our forgiveness is paid for.
- Our fellowship with him is guaranteed.
- And our future is secured.

Even in the middle of our darkest moments, the resurrection is a source of unshakeable joy!

#### b) Failure is replaced by Mission

But joy wasn't the only change for these guys. When Jesus was arrested, they all deserted him. But Jesus had not deserted them! He still had a purpose for them. **“As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”** John 20:21

In his grace these failed and fearful people now had the privilege to continue the mission that Jesus had begun. They were called to be witnesses of the most important message ever delivered. They declared on Pentecost: **“God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.”** Acts 2:32

And this message was so important because it gave hope to a lost and dying world. Jesus said to his disciples: **“If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”** John 20:23

Some people think Jesus was giving the apostles, and church leaders that followed them, the authority to listen to people's confessions and then forgive their sins.

But that's not what the disciples understood by Jesus' words. They responded to this by preaching the message of forgiveness through faith in Jesus. Peter's message on the day of Pentecost was **“Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.”** Acts 2:38

So Jesus gave to the apostles here the privilege of announcing heaven's terms on how someone can be forgiven. They declared that those who believed in Jesus were forgiven. But if someone rejected Jesus, then they were not forgiven!

Unfortunately this kind of clarity is not what people want to hear today. A few years ago, the pastor of one of the largest churches in the States was being interviewed by Larry King on his talk show.

King asked the pastor about other preachers who said that “If you believe in Christ, you are going to heaven. And if you don’t, no matter what you’ve done in your life, you ain’t”

The pastor’s reply was, “Yeah, I don’t know. There’s probably a balance between. I believe you have to know Christ. But I think that if you know Christ, if you’re a believer in God, you’re going to have some good works. I think it’s a cop-out to say I’m a Christian but I don’t ever do anything...” He was trying to avoid the question.

But King wouldn’t be put off. “What if you’re Jewish or Muslim, you don’t accept Christ at all?”

The pastor replied, “You know, I’m very careful about saying who would and wouldn’t go to heaven. I don’t know...”

King pressed the point further, “If you believe you have to believe in Christ, they’re wrong, aren’t they?”

The pastor said, “Well, I don’t know if I believe they’re wrong... I spent a lot of time in India with my father. I don’t know all about their religion. But I know they love God. And I don’t know. I’ve seen their sincerity. So I don’t know.”

But the apostles knew. They knew because Jesus told them that he was the way, the truth and the life, that no-one comes to the Father except through him! And so throughout their ministry, they confidently declared about Jesus that **“Salvation is found in no-one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”** Acts 4:12 Their mission and message was clear!

And we’re called to follow in their footsteps. As the Father sent Jesus into this world, so Jesus has sent each of us to continue his mission. Each and every one of us have been called to serve in his kingdom as his witnesses. We’ve been commissioned to take this message of God’s love and grace to a lost and dying world – to declare the wonderful news that only through faith in Jesus can we receive the full and free gift of forgiveness of our sins!

#### c) Weakness is replaced by Power

It is a wonderful message. And yet it is also a huge responsibility. But we’re not left on our own to struggle with it. After Jesus commissioned these disciples, **“He breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’”** John 20:22

They would have to wait 50 days, until Pentecost, to enter into the fullness of that promise. But Jesus showed here that that the gift of the Spirit comes from him. This is what Peter preached at Pentecost: **“Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.”** Acts 2:33

More than that, Genesis 2 records that when God made Adam: **“The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.”** Genesis 2:7

The breath of God brought Adam to life. But now, the Holy Spirit is the life-breath of the Risen Christ, that will bring eternal life to all who trust in him.

And as he comes into our lives, he brings the presence of God to us. The Spirit is the fulfilment of the promise of Jesus: **“I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”** Matthew 28:20

But he doesn’t only bring the presence of God to us, he also brings the power of God into us. Jesus promised these disciples, **“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you.”** Acts 1:8

And this is the same power that we can depend on to enable us to live for God! Paul prayed that we would know **“His incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength,<sup>20</sup> which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms.”** Ephesians 1:19–20

Because Jesus is alive, we can enjoy the fellowship of the Spirit in our lives. He comes into the lives of all who trust in Christ – renewing our hearts, assuring us that we’re God’s children, filling our hearts with his love and joy and peace, encouraging and directing us in our lives, teaching us God’s truth, transforming our lives and empowering us for service.

#### d) Fear is replaced by Courage

And so we don’t need to live in fear and worry. Instead we can live with confidence and courage.

That’s what happened to these disciples. They had been hiding behind locked doors in fear and anxiety. But the reality and power of the Risen Christ so impacted them that their enemies were shocked: **“When they saw the courage of Peter and**

John and realised that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.” Acts 4:13

Because they knew that Jesus had conquered the grave, then even the threat of persecution could not stop them from speaking about him.

### Conclusion

This is the life-transforming power of the resurrection. And even in these troubling times, we can experience this too. If we allow this truth to impact our lives, then

- Our Fear will be overcome
- Our Faith will be restored
- Our Future will be transformed

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