

**John 20:19-31**

No church bells were rung at the first Easter worship service; nor at the second. There were no signs out front welcoming visitors. There were no signs, period. Visitors and strangers were not just discouraged from coming—they were locked out! The first few Christian Sunday services after our Lord's resurrection were very different from today in some ways. In other ways, we today are much like them.

Our text begins: "On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, when the doors were locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews..." That doesn't sound much like us, does it? We haven't locked ourselves in here. We welcome all to come and join us. And we're not in this House today because we're cowering in fear. So there are some differences between our worship today and that of Jesus' disciples on those first Sundays of Easter.

At least...on the surface. We may not be visibly shaken with fear as they were, but perhaps that's because we've learned pretty well how to hide our fears. I think that deep down, we're just as fearful as they were. Not the same kinds of fears, and yet, honest to goodness fear.

We surely look much better than they did. We're dressed up. Our hair is combed. We've put on earrings, necklaces, deodorant. I doubt if those disciples spent much time preparing for their get-together within that locked house. They were surely a frightful sight to look at.

We may not be frightful on the outside, but what about on the inside? There are frightening things happening within us. What are you afraid of? Gas prices going even higher? Terrorists striking again? Are you fearful for your health? Are you afraid of losing a loved one to death? Perhaps you have fears in your heart because you had a fight with your spouse, or with your child. You're afraid for that relationship. It's on shaky ground right now. Are you afraid of the future...fearful of what it holds for you? Are you afraid of God? You have grievously disobeyed Him, and you may be fearful of what He thinks of you. You fear in your heart over whether He will ever accept you and love you.

I really think that we today are not that much different from Jesus' disciples on those Sundays long ago. We may look fine on the outside, but inside we're a mess. We're torn up inside. Fears, doubts, fighting's, sins—the heart of man does not change. As they were, so are we today. We come to church, not as people in control of our lives, but as people who are a wreck; who are living life on the edge. Augusta, Missouri and Jerusalem have much in common—us, and Jesus' disciples. We, like them, gather together, maybe not with doors locked, but with hearts full of fear of one kind or another.

It is so comforting, therefore, that Jesus comes to be with us as He did for them. He didn't ask them to invite Him in. Jesus simply appeared in their midst. You don't have to ask Jesus to come into your heart. In fact, we're so full of fears and troubles that the last thing on our mind is unlocking the door to Jesus—as if we even could—we are so sinful, so weak. But Jesus comes anyway. He comes to His baptized children gathered in His Name. He knows our fears. He knows our heavy heart. His disciples needed Him, so He came to them. And He comes to us. He comes through His word of peace.

“Peace be with you,” He said to them. Not, “Shame on you for hiding!” Not, “You sorry bunch of worthless sinners!” No, the word of peace is what He gave to them. That word is for you. Whatever fear is weighing on your heart today, Jesus gives you peace. The bloodshed is over. The fighting is over. Jesus’ death for you ended the war between God and you. He is at peace with you.

On the cross Jesus took on your fears. He met them...each one of them...and He defeated them. You see those scars in His hands and side? Those scars are for you. That fight you had with your loved one? It’s okay now. There is no need to fear. You can forgive each other because Jesus’ scars mean that He has already forgiven you. And that disease that may lead to death? It’s okay now. There is no need to fear. Because Jesus’ scars mean that He defeated death for you. Jesus gives you life that never ends. And your fear of the future? Jesus’ scars tell you that your future is in His hands. And since His hands were pierced for you, you have nothing to fear. He who gave His life for you will let nothing in your future come between you and His love for you. And your fear of God? Friend, Jesus’ scars give you the absolute assurance that God does not hold your sins against you. Jesus is your Savior. He paid the price for all your wrongdoings; all your lawlessness. His scars prove it.

Do you know that right now...this very minute...those very scars are still in Jesus’ hands and side? And every time you sin—every day, every hour, every minute—Jesus holds up His hands to His Heavenly Father and says, “Father, forgive him...forgive her; these scars are for them; I died for him...for her.”

So come...come and gather together. Come as Jesus’ disciples did. Gather with all your fears, all your doubts, your sins, and weaknesses. Jesus will not leave you alone. He comes to you. His word of peace through water and word, through bread and wine; His word of pardon and peace is for you. And through that comforting word He is here with you, and He is here for you. It matters not how torn up you are inside. He forgives you. He gives you hope. And next week, after having battled day after day...Monday through Saturday...with more troubles, and doubts, and fears, you can be assured that Jesus will be here again for you. This is His way—His way of peace—His way of peace for you. Amen.