

After Easter

It was Easter Weekend and the boss of a big company needed to call one of his employees about an urgent problem with one of the main computers. He dialled the employee's home telephone number and was greeted with a child's whispered, "Hello?"

The boss said, "Hello, Is your Daddy home?" "Yes," whispered the small voice.

"May I talk with him?" the man asked. To the surprise of the boss, the small voice whispered, "No."

Wanting to talk with an adult, the boss asked, "Ok, Is your Mummy there?"

"Yes," came the answer.

"May I talk with her?" Again, the small voice whispered, "No."

Thinking that it was not likely that a young child would be left home alone, the boss decided he would just leave a message with the person who should be there minding the child. "Is there anyone there besides you?" the boss asked the child.

"Yes," whispered the child, "a policeman."

Wondering what a cop would be doing at his employee's home, the boss asked,

"May I speak with the policeman?"

"No, he is busy," whispered the child.

"Busy doing what?" asked the boss.

"Talking to Daddy and Mommy and the Fireman," came the whispered answer.

Growing concerned and even worried as he heard what sounded like a helicopter through the ear piece on the phone, the boss asked, "What is that noise?"

"A hello-copper," answered the whispering voice.

"What is going on there?" asked the boss, now alarmed.

In a whispering voice, the child answered, "The search team just landed the hello-copper!"

Alarmed, concerned and a little frustrated, the boss asked, "Why are they there?"

Still whispering, the young voice replied (along with a muffled giggle), "They are looking for me!"

You can imagine the state the parents would have been in as they looked for their missing child.

Imagine the state the disciples would have been in when they discovered Jesus was missing. I have titled this message 'After Easter'

Imagine if you were one of the disciples.

Your best friend just got murdered, executed, in fact. You could have helped him escape, but instead you ran. You're angry and disappointed, not only in yourself, but in your friend, Jesus. He said he could handle it. He said he was big enough to avoid it. He said he was God. Or at least, that's what you thought you heard him say.

And now you're scared....People know who you are. You were inseparable for years. You witnessed his "crimes" and they know you were an accomplice. You are thinking to yourself, "How am I going to get out of this? How am I going to get out of town?" Your hopes have been dashed, your once bright future is now looking very dark indeed.

Can you picture the scene? You are all in a room, the doors are locked. The room is dim. There is a low murmur of voices in the background as you sit in a corner and review for the hundredth time the contradictions, the injustices, and your own role in the horrible death of your best friend.

Chances are, at some point in our life, we have all been sitting in a similar spot. Obviously not in a dark room, fearing for your life. But that deep sense of failure, where we have let ourselves down, or we failed our friends or family,

and Lord knows how many times we have betrayed our Master. We see our own sins, we know our own hearts and we become very good at either beating up on ourselves, or making up excuses.

Imagine being in that room on the evening when the disciples discovered that not only was their Master dead, but his body was gone. I wonder, "What do you see going on in that room? What do you see after the betrayal, after the disappointment, "after Easter"?"

Let's look at what the bible tells us was going on, reading from John 20

John 20:19-29

¹⁹ That Sunday evening the disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders.

Fear

The first thing we see is "Fear." It is very obvious and real – the disciples are scared. Fear has gripped their hearts and they no doubt conclude that the tragic fate of Jesus may soon be theirs. Their fear is the temple authorities, "the Jews", will find them and arrest them too. So they are in this room with the doors firmly locked.

Chances are fear is something that we have all had to deal with in some shape or form. All of us are born with a set of instinctive fears; fear of falling, fear of the dark, fear of snakes, fear of falling on snakes in the dark, many people have a fear of public speaking, that is not something I wrestle with. I have a fear of the words "Some Assembly Required."

Fear can be terrifying but it can also be funny. Call me insensitive but there is nothing funnier than a friend screaming hysterically in fear, while the rest of us are crying in laughter.

Story of the sleepover at the Wards.

Fear makes you do crazy things sometimes.

Here were the disciples of Jesus sitting in failure, betrayal, confusion, disappointment, shame, and guilt. If you read through the context around this passage in John 20, you will find that the disciples had misunderstood Jesus' teachings, had misinterpreted his miracles, and had even been misdirected by their own culture as they followed Jesus. No wonder they were afraid.

Most of the time fear comes because we do not understand what we are seeing or hearing. The disciples did not understand. They were afraid of being locked up and crucified. They were afraid of the Jews.

Forgiveness

But not only do we see fear in that room, after fear we see forgiveness.

¹⁹ That Sunday evening the disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders.

Suddenly, Jesus was standing there among them! "Peace be with you," he said. ²⁰ As he spoke, he showed them the wounds in his hands and his side. They were filled with joy when they saw the Lord! ²¹ Again he said, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you." ²² Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

We see forgiveness demonstrated by the first words out of Jesus' mouth when he enters the room. Shalom Aleichem, "Peace be with you!" Not "Where were you guys?" nor "How could you have let me down?" But, "Peace be with you" forgiveness from the start. How often do we fail to keep forgiveness by bringing up the past with someone? How many times do we make sure the other party knows how angry we are with them, how much it hurt?

A mother ran into the bedroom when she heard her five year old son scream. She found her one year old daughter pulling her sons hair. She gently released the little girl's grip and said comforting her son, "There, there. She didn't mean it. She doesn't know that hurts." He nodded his acknowledgement, and the mother left the room. As she started down the hall the little girl screamed. Rushing back in, she asked, "What happened?" The little boy replied, "She knows that it hurts now."

We also see forgiveness demonstrated by the assignment he immediately gave them. "I am sending you as the Father sent me." He immediately indicated his trust in them by giving them an assignment, a task, a command even, to carry on his work.

Jesus indicated his forgiveness by authorizing them to carry on the work that he himself had begun. Not only does he send them, enable them, but he authorizes them. He gives them his own authority.

Faith

And finally, after the fear, and after the forgiveness in that room, we see faith.

We see faith restored. Into that room walked someone they thought they would never see again. Hope sprang fresh from the gloom of their hearts. They witnessed in person the Living Lord, and they rejoiced. Their faith was restored.

One of the things I really like about this passage is that John shows us that there are different kinds of faith, and that faith comes in different ways, with differing intensities, to different people.

- Earlier in verse 8 of chapter 20, we see the beloved disciple believes upon seeing the empty tomb.
- Then in verse 16, Mary believes when the Lord calls her name.
- The disciples here in verse 20 believe when they actually see the risen Lord.
- And in verse 25, Thomas says that he must touch the wounds —although that need seems to evaporate once he sees the risen Christ.

People have differing needs and find various routes to faith.

Let's read the remainder of the passage.

²⁴ One of the twelve disciples, Thomas (nicknamed the Twin), was not with the others when Jesus came. ²⁵ They told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

But he replied, "I won't believe it unless I see the nail wounds in his hands, put my fingers into them, and place my hand into the wound in his side."

²⁶ Eight days later the disciples were together again, and this time Thomas was with them. The doors were locked; but suddenly, as before, Jesus was standing among them. "Peace be with you," he said. ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and look at my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don't be faithless any longer. Believe!"

²⁸ "My Lord and my God!" Thomas exclaimed.

²⁹ Then Jesus told him, "You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me."

We see faith shared. As instructed by Jesus the disciples witnessed to Thomas, and brought him back the next week. They immediately began to obey the "sending" assignment, and did so by going to one of their own that had missed out on the first experience.

Perhaps we can understand Thomas' reluctance to believe if we remember his words as Jesus prepared to go to Jerusalem—"Let us also go, that we may die with him" (John 11:16). Thomas had given his all, he had been zealous for Jesus, but he had seen his worst fears realized, that his zealousness would come to nothing. Jesus' crucifixion has broken him. The phrase, "Once burned, twice shy!" comes to mind. Thomas had believed, but his belief was betrayed. We can understand why he would be slow to believe again.

Thomas makes an outrageous demand: *"I won't believe it unless I see the nail wounds in his hands, put my fingers into them, and place my hand into the wound in his side."* (v. 25). Earlier, Jesus had condemned those who demanded signs and wonders before they would believe (4:48). Thomas goes even further. He is only prepared to lay aside his unfaith if the risen Jesus meets his criteria... Thomas demands that Jesus be 'touchable.' ...He insists that the risen body of Jesus fulfil his requirements.

And we see faith invited by Jesus. Without condemning or scolding, Jesus invites Thomas to examine the truth. He didn't call him a "Doubting Thomas." That's a name we've created for this man. But Thomas believed, and his faith was restored. It is helpful to note here that Thomas believed, lost faith and returns to even greater faith.

Whenever Jesus invites faith in himself, he does so with gentleness, kindness, recognizing our need for evidence, and then blessing us with greater faith. He does not condemn, nor does he resort to name calling. He invites us to examine him, to know him.

We worship a merciful God and so in spite of our sins, our betrayal and our fear, He wants to bless us with forgiveness and faith.

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