

Conley Memorial Presbyterian Church, Second Sunday of Easter, April 3, 2016

**Be Not Afraid**  
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April 3, 2016

Acts 5:27-32 John 20:19-31

Have you ever been afraid, really afraid? --- Afraid for your life?

That was what was in the minds of ten apostles as they gathered in a locked room a week after Jesus had been crucified. They were afraid of the Jewish authorities, afraid that they too might be arrested and suffer as Christ had suffered.

Jesus had been crucified, a horrible way to die. Not only had he been crucified, he had been nailed to the cross thus adding to his agony. Crucified individuals were typically tied to crosses with ropes. They weren't nailed. Nailing Jesus to the cross was even more cruel and vicious. Crucifixion was an incredibly brutal method of execution and with Jesus it was made even worse.

The disciples feared that the Pharisees, the Sanhedrin and the chief priests would come after them as they had done with Jesus. Of all of the apostles, the one who had shown real bravery in the past was Thomas. Thomas was very loyal to Jesus, so much so that he alone was willing to give his life for Christ.

When Lazarus died and Jesus was going to see Mary and Martha and to raise Lazarus, it was a very dangerous trip. The authorities were seeking to arrest Jesus and his going to Bethany, only about two miles from Jerusalem, was akin to walking into a lion's den. Except for Thomas, the disciples were reluctant to go, but Thomas said, "*Let us also go, that we may die with him.*" (John 11:16). Thomas was not afraid but the others were afraid, very afraid.

Ten of them had gathered after the crucifixion in that locked room but Thomas was not there. He was facing his grief alone while the others hid in their fear of the authorities.

Would you have reacted as Thomas did or would you have joined the ten in that locked room hiding out from the authorities? I suspect that most of us would have been in that room.

The ten were hiding, hiding out. They were locking out the world, but they couldn't lock Jesus out. He suddenly appeared to them saying, "Shalom, *peace be with you.*" That was the traditional greeting of the time but it was unusual in these circumstances. It wasn't just "Hello, how are you?" or, as we often say here in the South, "You doing alright?" Instead, it was a release from their fear, a release that filled them with joy."

Then Jesus said it again, "*Peace be with you!*" but added, "*As the father has sent me, I am sending you.*" He breathed on them and said, "*Receive the Holy Spirit.*"

Their fears left them, but not the dangers they would face in the future. They were no longer afraid. They had work to do and Jesus was sending them out to build his church.

Thomas was not there. He was elsewhere in his grief. Thomas probably was not surprised at Jesus having been arrested and crucified. When Jesus had proposed going to Bethany when Lazarus was dying, Thomas expected Jesus to be killed. He wasn't surprised at all at what had happened. Even though what he had expected had happened, he was broken-hearted. He could not face the others. He had to be alone with his grief.

Even though Jesus' appearance gave them joy, the ten disciples knew that they would undoubtedly face persecution, beatings, and possibly violent death in the years ahead. Jesus didn't promise them an easy future. He simply said, "Shalom, *peace be with you.*"

A week later Thomas, still grieving, joined the others in that locked room and Christ appeared once again saying, "Shalom, *peace be with you.*" Thomas is still skeptical and Jesus says, "*Put your fingers here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Stop doubting and believe.*"

Thomas was wholehearted in his response to Christ, "*My Lord and my God!*" His doubts were the prelude to his faith. He was convinced and gave his life to Christ as did the others.

Jesus did not tell the apostles that they would have an easy life following him. Indeed almost all of them would suffer and die for Christ. He told them that they would experience his peace and not be afraid.

Each Sunday we say, “The peace of Christ be with you.” We respond, “And also with you.” In larger churches the congregations often arise, grasp hands, and exchange the peace of Christ in this way.

Jesus is not telling us that everything will be good for us but that we can in all things experience his peace. That is his promise to each of us --- peace that passes all understanding, a peace that at times makes little sense in this broken world filled with strife and turmoil.

But the message really is “Be not afraid.” Do the work of the Lord in this time and place and He will grant us peace.

Let us pray, “Holy Spirit, help us not to be afraid. Help us to know Christ’s blessed peace.”

**Amen.**

Note: Scripture quotations are from the New International Version of the Bible, 2011