

# 1) Connected to Peace

John 20:19-31 • 2021-04-11 • Easter Series: Connected



For some things being disconnected can be tough. My family has gone without a connection to high-speed internet in our home for periods of time. Some of you might laugh at this, but we found it a little hard. I don't just mean the occasional outage many have come to expect in town, but months of not having any service. Sure, my wife and I spent much of our own childhood without high-speed internet, but we've become reliant on it for so many things. It was good to disconnect our home for a few months or even sometimes a whole year. We did enjoy the break from the constant bad news, and the overwhelming draw to stay connected every second with everyone you've ever met for one second. We were glad to avoid all the down sides of constantly being connected to the world. But we found it was still hard to keep up on what was going on with friends and family. We found it hard to search for information that was once at our fingertips. We had to shop differently and change our methods of entertainment. We couldn't stream the music we used to listen to so often. We felt disconnected from so many people and good things. We are glad that we decided to reconnect in February of last year, just before so many people became fearful of disease and disconnected from meeting in-person. At least then we were still able to make some connections online. It makes a difference being connected. Today, we begin a new series for the season of Easter. We'll be looking at what it means to be connected to Christ. Our connection to the living Savior makes a world of difference for our life.

Jesus' disciples had been very intricately connected to him. They had spent three years traveling everywhere with him on foot. They ate, drank, traveled, and found lodging with him day after day. And keep in mind that as they did this they weren't just intricately connected to Jesus. They were used to being in large crowds with him. At times, the crowds were so busy that Jesus and his disciples couldn't even find a time or place to get rest. Being a disciple of Jesus often meant being actively connected to many people. They were used to being seen and connected with all the people everywhere they went.

But it seemed as if all that connection had burst and broken to pieces. The disciples felt disconnected from Christ. He had died. Their teacher left them in the dark. But put more accurately, they left him. Men with torches, clubs, and swords came and arrested their Teacher. And when the going got tough, their connection with Jesus broke. One by one they all fled and deserted him. Jesus was disconnected from the crowds and his disciples, put on trial, condemned to die, and suffered an agonizing death. Jesus' disciples now felt like they no longer were close and connected to him.

Feeling disconnected from Christ was tough. After their Teacher's suffering and death, the disciples disconnected from society. They were no longer in front of the crowds. In fact, they went into hiding and behind locked doors. They shut out the people around them and went into isolation. Can you imagine seeing the same disciples who once walked with the crowds, served the 5000, and marched with Jesus as he was praised by the crowds around Jerusalem, now checking to see if anyone was following them in the dark? Can you picture the paranoia which filled their minds with fear so that they only answered the door if it was a close friend? They were gathered together, true. They still remained connected with each other. But what brought them together was fear.

What is most striking about this behavior is that the disciples continued to remain hidden in fear and disconnected from the world even though they knew Jesus had risen from the dead. They had eyewitnesses tell them about the resurrection. They had the prophecies of Scripture point them to it. They had the previous words of Jesus assure them of it. The resurrection of Jesus was *the topic* under discussion all that day. It was not unknown to them! And it is true, they had initially doubted the report of the women that the tomb was empty, and that Jesus was alive. Mark records the persistent doubt and hardness of hearts of some to believe the reports. Matthew mentions the faith along with the persistent hesitation of some to believe. But Luke and John record a clear record that faith in the resurrection of Jesus was taking hold in their hearts. The women saw and believed. Peter and John saw the tomb and believed. The eleven disciples (minus Thomas who was absent) shared their faith when they met two more eyewitnesses that evening. "It is true! The Lord has risen!" The truth was there that Jesus was alive. The faith was there which should have made them feel more alive. But they were all hiding and letting doubts fill their hearts and minds.

Don't Christians today still hide behind locked doors? It may not be as overt or an overly fear-filled and hiding. You might not find as many in our part of the world today peering over their shoulder in paranoia and fear because they might be targeted for being a Christian. But it is still fear that causes Christians to disconnect from the world today. Just as the disciples feared to broadcast the gospel, that Jesus had risen, and felt more comfortable hiding and protecting themselves, Christians today feel more comfortable doing what so much of today's world does. They get home from work and disappear in their homes.

And I get it. Your doors aren't locked in fear of someone discovering you're a Christian who believes in the resurrection. But could your doors be more open to those who might discover you are a Christian? Could you be more open about the news that you hear, "The Lord is risen!" Or might you at times just prefer to let that news sit quietly

behind locked doors? Maybe it feels safer to just let yourself disconnect from the amazing news of the resurrection than to disconnect yourself from those around you who might doubt you. It feels easier at times to avoid conflict by avoiding the excitement the resurrection ought to bring in our lives. And when we do gather together maybe there's a little fear that someone else might see and wonder what is going on. Maybe there's the fear of what they might think or how they might respond if they don't share in the faith which has taken hold of your heart. **"Let's not get too excited or cause any scene. Let's just try to blend in a bit and hope we don't draw too much attention to our gathering."**

Did any of those disciples behind locked doors deserve to have Christ reconnect with them and rekindle in them a living faith? Shouldn't he have just stuck with those who didn't doubt but stepped out onto the stage in confidence proclaiming, "Christ is risen!" even though it meant they'd be mocked and doubted? Do we deserve to have him come to us and bring life to a faith that allows us to disconnect and let faith dwindle and die?

Even if we are guilty of locking ourselves out from sharing the gospel, God doesn't lock himself out from us. Jesus came to his disciples and gave them just what they needed: connection to himself and his peace. *On the evening of that first day of the week, the disciples were together behind locked doors because of their fear of the Jews. Jesus came, stood among them, and said to them, "Peace be with you!"*

The greeting Jesus gave them was the signal that though none deserve it, God has restored the connection between himself and sinners. Jesus, the Son of God came to bring them peace. It was peace that came from the mouth of God who declared their sin paid for. And it was peace with God who showed them the marks that remained on his resurrected body. They were the marks that came when he paid for their sin. He stepped into history and himself faced the greatest disconnect that could ever occur. The eternal Son was disconnected from the Father as he faced the eternal price of sin and was forsaken once for all. Because he took our place, we no longer have to ever fear being separated from our God. We remain connected through Christ Jesus. "Peace be with you" was the greeting of the Son of God who had befriended sinners and brought them everlasting peace.

It says, "the disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord." This is the tenth time in John's gospel that Jesus is given that title. The title "Lord" refers to Jesus' divinity. He would one week later be acclaimed, "My Lord, and my God" by Thomas. He is the Lord who came down from heaven and took on human flesh. He is the Lord, the same "I AM" who made himself known through the prophets. He now made himself known as the crucified and risen Savior of all. He showed them his hands and his side. They saw how their Lord had died for them and was now alive. The Lord of all took on flesh, and bears the scars, marks of glory reminding us of our peace won by him.

Knowing that our Lord declares peace to us gives us that same overwhelming joy.

Jesus didn't just appear to his disciples so that they could receive the connection of peace he had won. He appeared to them so that they would be eyewitnesses of his peace and spread his peace. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you! Just as the Father has sent me, I am also sending you." After saying this, he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

The Holy Spirit is the one who imparts the peace of God into our hearts and minds. Without the Holy Spirit we would only be able to fall away from our connection to God and only live in fear. But with the Holy Spirit we have the peace that comes through faith in Christ. Every believer has the Holy Spirit working on their hearts. He sends his Spirit into our lives. And we receive the Spirit as he comes to us in the gospel today. He connects us to himself and through his Spirit we know we have peace with God.

Then Jesus gave them the authority to forgive sins. That is the way that we spread his peace. "When you forgive people's sins, they are forgiven." Peace isn't found apart from this. Peace comes from the Word of God assuring us that our sins have been forgiven. That word of God is spoken as we repeat forgiveness to one another. The Holy Spirit moves us to trust in Christ for peace and forgiveness and to freely give that forgiveness to all who repent and believe.

Brothers and sisters, we live in a world hemmed in by fear and the guilt of sin. It is a world that might be connected to itself, but that connection is only formed out of fear and uncertainty of what the future holds. We are connected by Christ to one another and to our Lord and God. That connection comes from the peace of sins forgiven by our crucified and risen Lord.

Thomas, one of the eleven was not connected with them in person. It appears it is because he had lost the connection of faith. God used the witness of his companions to first draw him to Christ. Then he too became an eyewitness of the risen Lord. But we are told "Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed." You are blessed as you trust in him. You are connected to Christ. You have the Holy Spirit working in your heart. You have the joy and peace of forgiveness of sins. And he calls us to share this connection today.