

SERMON – 3 April 2016 “Peace, power and purpose be with you” (Rev Dr Brenda Robson)

READING: John 20: 19 – 31

A reunion is happy, emotional, exciting!

Think of airport arrival halls, where family and friends scan the faces of the passengers coming through the doors or station platforms and people waiting around the barrier for their loved ones arriving.

Television programmes – finding families, long lost friends and bringing them together – “Surprise! Surprise!” with Cilla Black comes to mind.

There was something of a “Surprise Surprise” moment in that locked room we read about.

It was the last thing the disciples expected. Jesus was dead and they had seen the empty tomb earlier in the day. They were no doubt discussing where his body was, who had taken it, what would they do now?

How ecstatic were they when they saw him!

The disciples, seeing the Master with their own eyes, were exuberant. The Message

I imagine them jumping around and laughing and embracing each other.

And what did Jesus feel? I’m sure he was overjoyed and exuberant too. He had wept and prayed for his friends before he died. After the last supper with them he tried to prepare them and comfort them. He promised that he would go and prepare a place for them and would come back for them. He told them the way to get there. He told them that he would rebuild the temple in three days – but he knew that they did not fully understand.

He had said to them “My peace I give to you, my peace I leave with you. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

But they were troubled and afraid beyond endurance.

And so it must have been such a joy for Jesus to appear before his friends and for his friends to recognise him. Again he said “Peace be with you” and this time his peace would enter their hearts and never leave them.

What did Jesus do and say when he appeared to his friends?

Well, the doors were locked and he was simply and suddenly there, it was a miraculous event, a supernatural appearance.

He wasn't a ghost. The disciples believed in ghosts – Matthew tells us that when the disciples were out in a boat and saw Jesus walking on the water towards them they thought he was a ghost and they were afraid. In the locked room, they might have thought that this apparition could only be a ghost – after all Jesus was dead - but Jesus immediately spoke and showed them his hands and his feet. He had a physical body, the same as theirs but different.

Isn't it good to know that Jesus can go anywhere he pleases, penetrate any place or situation. He knows us better than we know ourselves.

Psalm 139: Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.

If Jesus had knocked on the door when the disciples were hiding in fear, I suspect that they would not have opened the door to let him in. And so it is with so many people. They hide away from God because of pride or shame or guilt or fear or any number of reasons. But Jesus can break in, sometimes unexpectedly, to be in our midst.

We are often afraid as the disciples were afraid. Their leader had been crucified by the authorities and so they were justifiably afraid. They might have expected to be hunted and crucified just like their master. After all, Peter had been challenged three times in the courtyard after Jesus' arrest and in his terror he denied knowing Jesus. And so they were all hiding in fear in a locked room.

We have many fears. Some are common fears, fear of illness, fear for our families and loved ones, anxiety about finances, about the success of our ventures, about how we will die.

Some have unique fears and anxieties because of their life experiences, past struggles, trauma.

Some have life limiting, crippling fears, obsessive compulsive disorders, behaviour that controls our lives and prevents us from being relaxed and confident.

Jesus comes when we cry out to him in our fears. He does not wait until we have it all sorted, he does not leave us to sort it out on our own, he comes to us in the middle of our mess, our crisis, our weakness.

David knew this and there are several psalms where he cries out to the Lord to come quickly –

Psalm 38 – O Lord, do not forsake me; be not far from me O my God. Come quickly and help me, O Lord my Saviour

Psalm 40 – Yet I am poor and needy, may the Lord think of me. You are my help and my deliverer. O my God, do not delay.

Psalm 70 – Hasten, O Lord, to save me. O Lord, come quickly to help me.

My son Gordon was driving on the Edinburgh city by-pass last Saturday with his mother-in-law Lorna beside him and his wife Cheryl in the back seat with baby Innes. They were running late for a funeral and Gordon was doing close to 70 mph when he moved out to overtake a van. The van had a load of wooden planks on the top and as they approached, the load suddenly burst loose and the planks of wood came flying through the air and showered their car. The paint was scraped off the bonnet through to the metal and the doors and roof were damaged. Lorna shouted out “Help us, Lord!” Gordon shouted out some words that are not repeatable! The windscreen was cracked in two places but it did not shatter and amazingly Gordon was able to steer the car across the road to the hard shoulder and stop safely. We all thanked God for his protection. Lorna had the presence of mind and the trust in God to shout out “Help us Lord.”

We just need to call out his name and he’ll come running. The words of a song came to mind, a song written by Carole King in 1971 and also sung by James Taylor, called You’ve got a friend. – if we think of the friend in this song as Jesus, the words are quite powerful -

When you're down and troubled
And you need some love and care
And nothing, nothing is going right
Close your eyes and think of me
And soon I will be there
To brighten up even your darkest night

You just call out my name
And you know wherever I am
I'll come running to see you again

Winter, spring, summer or fall
All you have to do is call
And I'll be there
You've got a friend

If the sky above you
Grows dark and full of clouds
And that old north wind begins to blow
Keep your head together
And call my name out loud

Soon you'll hear me knocking at your door
You've got a friend

Carole King later said to James Taylor, about this song, "The song was as close to pure inspiration as I've ever experienced. The song wrote itself. It was written by something outside myself, through me."

There is something almost spiritual, from God, in what she describes, the way that writers of spiritual songs might speak and attribute their inspiration to God.

Jesus came and stood among them. And he said "Peace be with you."

He was going to give them power – he would breathe the life of the holy spirit into them.

He would give them purpose – he was sending them out into the world with his message of forgiveness and salvation.

But before he gave them power and purpose, he had to give them peace. The peace of Jesus had just been achieved two days before, on the cross through the shedding of his blood. It was a peace, not as the world gives but only as he can give. It was a peace that entered five different areas of relationship in our lives -

Peace between us and Jesus – he comes to help us and guide us and love us, not to judge

Peace between us and God – God's justice has been satisfied by the Son carrying our sins, so that God becomes the loving Father

Peace between us and others, our brothers and sisters in Christ – Among Christian brothers and sisters there should be no hostility or jealousy or racism or sexism and elitism. Galatians 3 : 28 says "**There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female**, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

Peace between us and our souls – so many people are weighed down by a guilty conscience, a heavy burden of sin, of feelings of unworthiness and inadequacy. People cannot forgive themselves – but that is what Good Friday is for, that is why Jesus did what he did. Hebrews 9 considers that before Jesus, the Jews' forgiveness for sin and a clean conscience came through the blood of sacrificed animals, goats, bulls and lambs. Verse 14 says "**How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death so that we may serve the living God.**"

Peace between us and Jesus, between us and God, between us and our fellow Christians, between us and our consciences and fifthly,

Peace in the world – Some day, in God's timing, all evil will be overcome and the entire new creation, the new heaven and the new earth, will be full of peace and righteousness. As Isaiah prophesied **"Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding justice and righteousness from that time on and for ever."**

All this Jesus achieved by going to the cross and finally saying "It is finished." It was an amazing achievement.

Do you receive his peace today? When we share the peace at the end of communion, when we have gathered round the table, do you hold that peace for a short time and then lose it, lose it when you leave here and go out into the world?

Peace is a gift from God. We can take it or we can leave it. We can receive Jesus or we can walk away from him.

If you have received the risen Christ as your Saviour and Lord, your heart's desire, your friend, if you long for him as the deer pants for water, then you have the peace that he gives.

"Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Romans 5 : 1)

AMEN