



32A BIBLE STUDY

Peace be with you

Abstract

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32A Bible Study

Peace be with you

SUNDAY, APRIL 19, 2020 | EASTER | SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER
YEAR A

<i>First Reading</i>	Acts 2:14a, 22–32
<i>Psalm</i>	Psalm 16
<i>New Testament</i>	1 Peter 1:3–9
<i>Gospel</i>	John 20:19–31

John 20.19-31

The risen Jesus appears among his disciples when Thomas is absent. Jesus breathes on them and says, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'. A week later, Jesus appears again and speaks to Thomas directly. Thomas cries out, 'My Lord and my God!'

This week's resources explore: accepting the invitation to embrace the risen Jesus.

A prayer of approach

As the disciples in the locked room reached out and touched you,
let us reach out and touch you today, living Lord Jesus.
Let us feel your scarred hands and feet.
Let us put our hands in your side.
Let us be still
and know that you are our Lord and our God.
Amen.

Introduction

The disciples had almost been arrested with Jesus. They remained under the fear of death at the hands of the Jews (i.e., the Jewish authorities), so they met in secret at night, with fear, behind locked doors. (What a contrast with their boldness about seven weeks later on the day of Pentecost!).

In his Gospel, John has traced the development of unbelief, which culminated in Jesus' enemies crucifying Him. Conversely, John also traced the disciples' development of faith, which was now climaxed in Thomas.

Reading

John 20:19–31 (NRSV)

¹⁹ When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." ²² When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

²⁴ But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

²⁶ A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” ²⁸ Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” ²⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹ But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Exegesis Gospel John 20.19-31

All this week's readings show the resurrection of Jesus as a hinge point in history: Jesus is vindicated by the Father, we are borne into a new relationship with God, and the Holy Spirit comes to the disciples when Jesus breathes upon them.

The resurrection stories in John's Gospel often centre on a particular character. Last week it was all about Peter. It is as if John is saying: if you want to understand what this event means, look closely at what it meant for this individual (e.g. Peter standing around the fire, Mary Magdalene at the tomb).

Here we see the disciples' encounter with the risen Jesus through the prism of Thomas' unique experience of being left out of the group, and then being included when Jesus speaks directly to him. There is a common thread running between these two encounters one week apart: it is crucial that the disciples realise that this is truly the one who was crucified. In verse 20, Jesus shows them his hands and his side, and in verse 27 he says to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and see my hands.' It is only when they all see the continuity between the one who suffered and the risen one that they know that they are not seeing a ghost or a vision. Death and resurrection are found to be equally real, and so the disciples rejoice (v.20) and Thomas utters one of the most profound of the early creeds: 'My Lord and my God!' (v.28).

Jesus' words of greeting, 'Peace be with you', are bound up with this encounter. This is not the quiet peace of the status quo, of life as normal, this is the disruptive yet reassuring peace that comes because he is risen from the dead. It is the beginning of something new. Jesus breathes on his disciples and says, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'. The word for 'breathed' here picks up an echo of Genesis 2.7 and Ezekiel 37.9; it is a breath that brings divine life, new creation, a spiritual presence that only the resurrection has released into the community of disciples. With it comes new authority and responsibility to be God's agents in the continuing work of forgiveness and redemption. The arc of this story then reaches from the first century right out to us in the twenty-first century: 'These are written so that you may come to believe...and that through believing you may have life in his name.'

Look at this week's picture.

- 'What experiences make you feel most 'at peace'?'
- How would you feel about sharing this moment with someone?
- What difference does it make having accepted Jesus into your life?
- What experiences make you feel most 'at peace'?

Live your faith

Are there 'untouchables' – people no one touches – in your world?

Or maybe people you have 'lost touch' with?

Seek to make a new connection with someone this week;

say 'Peace be with you' or 'Shalom alechem'.

Note:

Shalom alechem is a spoken greeting in Hebrew, meaning "peace be upon you." The appropriate response is alechem shalom ("unto you peace"). It is also a traditional song sung by Jews every Friday night upon returning home from synagogue prayer. It signals the arrival of the Jewish Sabbath, welcoming the angels who accompany a person home on the eve of the Sabbath.

A sending out prayer

Let us take the touch of the risen Christ,

and the peace that he gives,

out with us into the world.

Let us breathe his life-giving Spirit

on all those we meet this week.

Amen.