

JOHN 20:19-31

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

THE PAST TWO YEARS OF LIFE ON EARTH HAVE BEEN CHALLENGING, SINCE THE ARRIVAL OF COVID-19.

ONE OF THE THINGS SPOKEN CONCERNING THE IMPACT OF COVID IS THAT THINGS WILL NEVER BE THE SAME, SINCE COVID HAS CREATED A NEW NORMAL.

IT MIGHT BE HELPFUL, THEREFORE, TO REMEMBER THAT NORMAL IS NOT A STAGNANT CONDITION.

IN THE PAST OTHER ILLNESSES HAVE COME UPON CREATION WHICH CHANGED THINGS.

THEN EITHER TREATMENTS, OR IN SOME CASES, CURES WERE FOUND AND THAT ALTERED AGAIN WHAT WAS NORMAL.

ALSO-WARS ARE FOLLOWED BY PEACE, AND EVENTUALLY WAR AGAIN. NATIONS RISE AND FALL, EVEN PEOPLE CHANGE.

IN FACT, WHAT IS NORMAL WHEN WE ARE BORN CHANGES AS WE GROW.

THEREFORE, WE ENCOUNTER MANY NEW NORMALS THROUGHOUT LIFE.

LET US ALSO REMEMBER THE FACT THAT SOME DEGREE OF CHANGE WAS IMPLANTED IN CREATION.

TRULY, IT CAN BE SAID ABOUT THE FIRST SIX DAYS THAT WHAT WAS NORMAL CHANGED EACH DAY AS GOD WORKED ON CREATION.

THEN, ON THE SEVENTH DAY-GOD RESTED, WHICH ALSO WAS A CHANGE.

EVEN MORE SO-GOD CREATED THE SUN TO SHINE DURING THE DAY AND THE MOON AND STARS AT NIGHT-AND THIS MEANS GOD INTENDED SOME DEGREE OF CHANGE.

CONSEQUENTLY, THE RISE OF A NEW NORMAL IS TO BE EXPECTED FROM TIME TO TIME, AND TO THINK OTHERWISE IS A TYPE OF VANITY.

AND REMEMBER, WHILE MANY OF CHANGES IN THE WORLD OR OUR INDIVIDUAL LIVES ARE SIGNIFICANT, AND SOME, LIKE COVID, ARE SERIOUS, NONE ARE REALLY EARTHSHATTERING ON A GLOBAL SCALE.

THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES OPENS BY ADDRESSING THE EARTHLY REALITY OF REPETITION IN THE MIDST OF WHAT APPEARS TO BE GREAT CHANGE.

ONE OF ITS OFTEN-QUOTED PROVERBS IS FOUND IN VERSE NINE:

“WHAT HAS BEEN IS WHAT WILL BE, AND WHAT HAS BEEN DONE IS WHAT WILL BE DONE; THERE IS NOTHING NEW UNDER THE SUN.”

IT CERTAINLY CAN BE SAID THAT SINCE SIN ENTERED INTO GOD’S PERFECT CREATION, THERE HAVE BEEN NO OTHER UNPRECEDENTED CHANGES ON A GLOBAL SCALE FOR A VERY LONG TIME.

THE FIRST CHANGE THAT COULD TRULY BE CALLED NEW- WAS THE INCARNATION AND BIRTH OF CHRIST, BECAUSE THAT EVENT MARKED GOD ENTERING INTO CREATION AS A HUMAN BEING.

THE ADVENT OF JESUS’ BIRTH DID BRING WITH IT A NEW NORMAL IN GOD’S INTERACTION WITH CREATION.

THE NEXT, AND ONLY OTHER UNPRECEDENTED AND EARTHSHATTERING CHANGE THAT ACTUALLY CREATED AN UNMATCHED NEW NORMAL WAS CHRIST’S RESURRECTION.

THE NEW NORMAL THAT EVENT CREATED WILL NOT LIKELY BE MATCHED UNTIL THE PHYSICAL RETURN OF JESUS TO EARTH.

SO TODAY, WE CONTINUE OUR LOOK AT THE MEANING OF CHRIST’S RESURRECTION THAT BEGAN ON EASTER SUNDAY.

THE GOSPEL READING TAKES US BACK TO THE EVENING OF THE DAY JESUS ROSE FROM THE DEAD.

THE FIRST THING OF NOTE IN THE READING IS THAT THE DISCIPLES WERE AFRAID, EVEN AFTER BEING TOLD JESUS WAS ALIVE AGAIN.

THEY GATHERED BEHIND LOCKED DOORS- FEARFUL OF REPRISALS, BECAUSE THEY FOLLOWED JESUS, OR PERHAPS THEY THOUGHT THEY WOULD BE ARRESTED FOR STEALING HIS BODY.

THEN SUDDENLY JESUS STOOD AMONG THEM. HIS APPEARANCE IN THE ROOM WITHOUT COMING THROUGH A DOOR OR WINDOW OR THE ROOF WAS SOMETHING NEW.

JESUS WAS ALIVE AGAIN IN HIS HUMAN BODY, WHICH SHOWED THE SCARS OF HIS SUFFERING AND DEATH.

HE SPOKE AND BREATHED JUST LIKE A REAL LIVING PERSON. AND YET HIS HUMAN BODY WAS NOT EXACTLY THE SAME.

JESUS LIVED AGAIN IN THE NEW NORMAL OF A BODY THAT WAS NO LONGER MORTAL, OR SUBJECT TO THE LAWS OF NATURE.

IN THIS ALONE HIS FOLLOWERS AND FAMILY WERE SHOWN THAT WHAT HAPPENED TO JESUS BROUGHT GREAT CHANGE.

THE FIRST CHANGE WAS HIS DECLARATION OF PEACE, WHICH CAN BE UNDERSTOOD ON MANY LEVELS.

THE PEACE OF THE TRADITIONAL JEWISH GREETING OF THAT TIME, THE PEACE MEANT TO CALM THEIR FEARS, THE PEACE JESUS PROVIDED BETWEEN THEM AND GOD.

WE MIGHT ALSO SEE THE PEACE JESUS GAVE AS HIS WAY OF HELPING THEM TO MAKE PEACE WITH THEIR PAST, AND THE NEW NORMAL OF THEIR PRESENT.

CHRIST’S PEACE IS ALSO OFFERED TO US- IF WE WILL RECEIVE IT. PEACE IN OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD AND ONE ANOTHER.

PEACE WITH OUR PAST AND IN THE PRESENT, PEACE WITH WHAT WILL COME IN THE FUTURE.

THIS PEACE IS REAL AND POWERFUL, AND YET IT DOES NOT IMMEDIATELY ERASE ALL FEAR OR STRESS WITHIN US.

NOTICE ALSO-THIS PEACE CAME UPON THE DISCIPLES WITHOUT JESUS EXPLAINING WHAT HAPPENED OR WHAT IT ALL WOULD MEAN FOR THEM.

THIS IS A GOOD REMINDER FOR US ABOUT THE PEACE THAT PASSES UNDERSTANDING-IT OFTEN COMES BEFORE WE UNDERSTAND; AND LINGERS, IF WE LET IT, EVEN WHEN UNDERSTANDING NEVER COMES.

CHRIST'S PEACE IS A STARTING POINT FOR US, LIFELINE TO GRAB ONTO IN STORMY SEAS-IN OUR LIVES, OR THE WORLD, OR EVEN JUST WITHIN US.

ANOTHER SIGNIFICANT FACT OF CHRIST'S PEACE IS WHAT IS BEHIND ALL OF THE WAYS HE OFFERS PEACE.

I AM REFERRING TO THE FORGIVENESS OF SIN, MADE POSSIBLE BY HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION.

THIS PEACE CHANGED BOTH LIFE ON EARTH AND ETERNAL LIFE, REDEFINING THE PURPOSE OF THE FORMER AND OPENING THE WAY FOR THE LATTER.

AN ILLUSTRATION OF THIS IS FOUND IN A STORY A MAN TOLD ABOUT HIS GRANDPARENTS.

THEY CAME INTO THIS COUNTRY THROUGH ELLIS ISLAND. HIS GRANDMOTHER HAD LEFT HOME TO GET AWAY FROM HER ABUSIVE FATHER, WHO BEAT HER OFTEN.

SHE LEFT WITHOUT ANY WAY TO PROVE HER IDENTITY, AND WITHOUT SPONSORS TO GAIN ENTRY INTO THE U.S.A.

WHEN SHE ARRIVED ON ELLIS ISLAND AND COULD NOT PRODUCE ANYTHING NEEDED TO ENTER THE COUNTRY AN "X" WAS PLACED ON HER ARM-INDICATING REJECTION.

ONCE THE OFFICER MOVED AWAY, A MAN STANDING IN THE NEXT LINE-REACHED OVER AND WIPED OFF THE "X", AND INVITED HER TO COME BESIDE HIM.

WHEN THEY REACHED THE WINDOW-HE SHOWED HIS PAPERS AND TOLD THE OFFICIAL THE WOMAN WAS WITH HIM, AND THEY BOTH GOT INTO THE COUNTRY.

THE MAN AND THE WOMAN HE GAVE A NEW LIFE TO WERE SOON MARRIED.

THE STORY OFFERS ONE WAY TO UNDERSTAND WHAT JESUS DOES FOR THOSE WHO BELIEVE IN HIM.

HE STANDS BESIDE US AND OFFERS HIS HAND AND IF WE TAKE IT JESUS CLAIMS US AS HIS OWN.

THIS IS THE PEACE AND THE POWER OF THE NEW NORMAL IN THE SINNER'S RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, JESUS HIS SON PROVIDES.

THE APOSTLE PAUL SUMMARIZES THE NEW NORMAL IN ROMANS 8:31-32:

"WHAT, THEN, SHALL WE SAY IN RESPONSE TO THESE THINGS? IF GOD IS FOR US, WHO CAN BE AGAINST US? "

HE WHO DID NOT SPARE HIS OWN SON, BUT GAVE HIM UP FOR US ALL—HOW WILL HE NOT ALSO, ALONG WITH HIM, GRACIOUSLY GIVE US ALL THINGS?"

THIS IS THE EARTHSHATTERING CHANGE CHRIST'S RESURRECTION MADE POSSIBLE.

NEXT, AFTER PROCLAIMING HIS PEACE UPON THEM, THE RISEN LORD REVEALED THAT WHEN HE WISHED IT, EVEN HIS BREATH HAD CHANGED.

JESUS BREATHED HIS SPIRIT UPON THEM. HIS BREATH DEMONSTRATED THE NEW NORMAL BROUGHT ABOUT BY HIS RESURRECTION BY GIVING THEM POWER AND PURPOSE.

THIS BRINGS US TO THOMAS, WHO HAD A LITTLE MORE DIFFICULTY ACCEPTING THE REALITY OF THE CHANGES HE HEARD ABOUT CONCERNING JESUS.

MANY OF US CAN EMPATHIZE WITH HIM, WHEN WE STRUGGLE WITH CHANGE THAT HAPPENS OUTSIDE OF OUR CONTROL.

FOR HIM, THE OLD NORMAL THAT JESUS WAS DEAD AND THAT WAS THE END, WAS TRAGIC, SAD, AND NOT DESIRABLE.

BUT AT LEAST IT WAS COMFORTABLE IN THE SENSE THAT IT CONFORMED WITH THE WAY THE WORLD WAS.

HOWEVER, NEWS JESUS WAS REALLY-PHYSICALLY ALIVE AGAIN WAS NOT NORMAL.

IT SOUNDED TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE, AND IF IT WAS IT MEANT THOMAS' AND EVERYONE ELSE'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD AND WHAT IS POSSIBLE OR NOT HAD TO CHANGE.

IT SHOULD NOT BE SURPRISING HE HAD DOUBTS TOO STRONG TO TAKE ANYONE'S WORD THAT JESUS ROSE FROM THE DEAD.

CONSEQUENTLY, THOMAS WOULD NOT, COULD NOT, BELIEVE WITHOUT MEETING JESUS AGAIN FACE TO FACE.

THE LORD COMPLIED WITH HIS NEED AND APPEARED AGAIN IN THE ROOM WHEN THOMAS WAS WITH THE REST OF THE DISCIPLES, AND OFFERED THEM HIS PEACE ONCE MORE.

HIS APPEARANCE ROCKED THOMAS' WORLD IN A WAY HE NEVER EXPECTED IT COULD BE.

BUT NOTICE, THOMAS WAS WILLING TO BE CHANGED BY HIS PERSONAL EXPERIENCE WITH JESUS, AND THEREFORE HE WAS TRANSFORMED.

DOUBTING THOMAS CHANGED INTO A MAN WHO IMMEDIATELY CONFESSED JESUS AS HIS LORD AND GOD.

IN THIS WE CAN LEARN A FEW IMPORTANT THINGS FROM HIM. FIRST, HE DID NOT DENY HIS DOUBTS-BUT INSTEAD EXPRESSED THEM.

SECONDLY, WHILE THOMAS WAS NOT EASILY SWAYED TO ACCEPT THE NEW NORMAL, HE WAS NOT STUBBORN.

INDEED NOT, ONCE HE GRASPED JESUS WAS ALIVE AGAIN, HE THREW HIMSELF COMPLETELY INTO WHAT THAT MEANT.

NO, HE STILL DID NOT UNDERSTAND HOW OR WHY IT HAPPENED BUT THOMAS SAW JESUS AS GOD WHO STOOD BEFORE HIM. JESUS WELCOMED THOMAS AND HIS WORSHIP.

JESUS THEN ISSUED A BLESSING FOR ALL THOSE WHO, UNLIKE THOMAS, OR THE REST OF JESUS' DISCIPLES AND FOLLOWERS, BELIEVE IN HIM AS LORD AND GOD WITHOUT SEEING JESUS PHYSICALLY.

BUT NOTICE, JESUS NEVER SAID "BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO DO NOT HAVE DOUBTS", BUT RATHER: "BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HAVE NOT SEEN AND YET HAVE COME TO BELIEVE."

ONE FINAL THOUGHT ON TODAY'S GOSPEL PASSAGE IS FOUND IN THE CLOSING REMARKS ABOUT MIRACLES.

MANY WERE PERFORMED BY CHRIST'S DISCIPLES AFTER PENTECOST.

BUT NOTICE, OTHER THAN JESUS BEING ABLE TO APPEAR AND DISAPPEAR OUTSIDE THE LAWS OF NATURE-HE DID NOT DO ANY MORE MIRACLES, THAT WE KNOW OF.

INSTEAD, JESUS HIMSELF, HIS RESURRECTION WAS THE MIRACLE THAT TRANSFORMED THE WORLD IN THE GREATEST WAY SINCE SIN INFECTED CREATION. THANKS BE TO GOD.

LET US PRAY: GRACIOUS GOD FOR WHOM NO DOOR IS CLOSED, NO HEART IS LOCKED, DRAW US BEYOND OUR DOUBTS, SO THAT WE MAY FIND PEACE IN THE MIGHTY RESURRECTION OF YOUR SON.

IT IS THROUGH JESUS YOU OVERCAME THE OLD ORDER OF SIN AND DEATH TO MAKE ALL THINGS NEW IN HIM.

GRANT THAT WE WHO CELEBRATE WITH JOY CHRIST'S RISING FROM THE DEAD MAY BE RAISED FROM THE DEATH OF SIN TO THE LIFE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS; THROUGH HIM WHO LIVES AND REIGNS WITH YOU AND THE HOLY SPIRIT, ONE GOD, NOW AND FOREVER. AMEN

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