

Fear, Transformation and Commission in the way of Jesus

On Sunday, we reflected on the resurrection appearance of Jesus among the disciples in John 20 :19-23. We thought about three dimensions of this encounter.

1. The reality and crippling hold of fear.
2. The transforming power, peace and joy that comes from encountering the resurrected Lord Jesus, and,
3. The commission to be sent in *the way of Christ*.

We reflected on the impact of:

- a. Jesus speaking His words of peace, not once, but twice over the disciples, because the world that he sends them back into is a world of unpeace, and because he knows that they're struggling with fears and doubts, and also, because the *way of Christ* is costly. And
- b. Jesus breathing His Spirit over them, because they (and we) need the power of the Holy Spirit in every dimension of our life and discipleship.

At the heart of our passage was this statement from Jesus '*As the father has sent me, I am sending you*'. After looking back at Jesus' prayer for his disciples in John 17:13-19, we thought about three dimensions of going 'as the Father has sent the Son'. Each of these dimensions presented a kind of tension or paradox between two different extremes, both of which are part of what it means to go in *the way of Christ*, but which historically Christians have ended up being polarised and leaning towards either one or other of these. They were,

1. The call to be monks *AND* merchants
2. Call to proclaim *AND* demonstrate the good news
3. Call to be sanctified by the Word *AND* be Spirit empowered.

We concluded with a reminder that,

1. Geography is less important than doxology
2. Context varies, but our calling is common, and,
3. A warning to beware of false choices.

Questions to consider:

1. In the text of John 20 verse 19, it tells us that the disciples were together with the doors locked "for fear of the Jewish leaders".

- *Apart from the Jewish religious authorities, what other fears do you think the disciples would've been struggling with?*
- *In many ways, their fears were reasonable and understandable. How can reasonable or rational fears lead to us submitting to the spirit of fear?*
- *What fears do you struggle with and how do these shape your choices, your actions, your reactions to other people, to change, to risk or to failure?*

2. Jesus literally turns up in the room... he is present in his physical resurrection body with them.

- *What impact does this have?*
- *What is it that transforms the disciples from a disabling or crippling fear to having joy, and being willing to be sent back into a scary world?*

Those early disciples encountered the bodily resurrection presence of Jesus. We haven't had the same experience.

- *So, how do/can we encounter the risen Lord Jesus today?*

3. At the heart of our passage, in John 20:21 Jesus says 'as the Father has sent me, I am sending you.' If we think back over the life and ministry of Jesus in the Gospels we could say so much about what it means to be sent in the 'Way of Christ'. Let's think about Jesus' prayer for his disciples and for us who have believed through them, in John 17:13-19. **(Read this)**

- *How does the paradox of being in-but-not-of the world affect every single aspect of our Christian life, discipleship and mission?*
- *How do you see the 'monk-merchant' divide playing out throughout church history?*
- *What are some of the dangers of polarising the different vocations of those who are in ordained/consecrated ministry (missionaries, ministers etc.) and those who are working in the so-called 'secular' workplace?*
- *Is it possible to separate proclamation from demonstration in our life and ministry? What are some of the dangers of such a separation?*

4. In Jesus' prayer in John 17, and in a passage from John 20, it seems clear that Jesus wants us to be sanctified by the Word and empowered by his Spirit. John 20:22, Jesus breathes on them and says 'Receive the Holy Spirit'. The word 'breathed' is the same as the word used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament in Genesis 2:7 when God breathes life into Adam.

- *What is this passage telling us about the relationship between Jesus, the Holy Spirit and the Father?*
- *How conscious are you of the presence of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Jesus (see Rom 8:9), and the Spirit of the Father (see Matt 10:20) in your daily life?*
- *Why do you think it is that so many of us seem to be trying to live out our calling in Christ without the comforting, consoling, exhorting and JOY-giving and empowering presence of the Holy Spirit?*