

There are times in life where everything changes in an instant.

When two people exchange vows, and say the words 'I do' their whole reality is altered. They are no longer living for self, but have committed to living for another.

When someone suffers from stroke, their reality changes doesn't it? Things that were once taken for granted, may require a huge effort or even become impossible.

When we receive an unexpected diagnosis. Our whole future can hang in the balance. What we thought life would hold is suddenly, very uncertain.

When a child is born, a new reality is issued in as a couple become parents, parents become grandparents, and maybe even grandparents become great-grandparents. In those moments, everything is altered.

On the evening the very first Easter Day, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders everything changed. Their whole reality, was altered when Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" - Shalom.

In that moment everything changed. They were now face to face with the Risen Lord who in a simple greeting of "peace," signals a new Ultimate reality that God's Kingdom peace was taking hold in the world. In the same encounter, Jesus passes a mandate to his followers, so that they might find their place in this new reality.

We're going to explore those two lines of thought this morning First the 'peace' Jesus ushers in, and then the mandate Jesus gives his followers. But before we do, why don't we pray.

Heavenly Father thank you for your Word, and that you speak to us by it today. What a joy it is, to have our lives shaped and challenged by a God who speaks! We pray today that you would impress on our hearts the Ultimate Reality of your peace at work in this world, and in our lives, and help us to live out a believers' mandate as faithful followers of the Lord Jesus. Help us by your Holy Spirit we pray. Amen.

When you think over the events of Easter you can see why the first words of the risen Lord Jesus to his disciples are 'Peace be with you'.

It's a time of great turmoil for the disciples. They are hiding behind locked doors, because of the fear of being rounded up by the Jewish leaders. In their minds they could very easily be dealt with the same way Jesus was, hung on Roman crosses. If Jesus with his huge following could be so easily murdered, by jealous and corrupt religious leaders, then to snuff out this rag tag bunch of followers would take almost no real effort at all. In a moment, their fear gives way to exceeding joy.

Jesus appears among them. He is alive! Showing his hands and side in v.20 Jesus demonstrates clearly that he is the same one who was crucified; there is absolutely no doubt that their Lord, Jesus himself stands before them in the flesh, alive, but bearing the marks of the Roman cross and soldier's spear.

Again Jesus in v.21 says 'peace be with you.' John is at pains to point out this greeting twice, he is highlighting something for us much more than the customary greeting of 'Shalom.' John is joining dots for the reader.

Jesus has promised peace before; do you remember John 14, where Jesus describes the place he is going; he's returning back to the Father - "Do not let your hearts be troubled, Believe in God but believe in me

also”... near the end of that discourse in v.27 he speaks of peace ‘Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you, not as the world gives.’

And in chapter 16, Jesus has been speaking of the coming hour of his departure, and in v.33 he concludes the section with “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

In John’s writing there is a pairing of ideas. He is helping us to see that the peace of Jesus, comes only as result of his death and resurrection. It’s a peace above the natural peace this world can give from a few days rest, or a walk on the beach, or owning your own home, or having a secure job, or enjoying +good health.

He is describing a peace which is linked to the end of time and the return of the Lord Jesus on the last day. He is signaling a peace that comes from a restored relationship between sinful people and a Holy God. He is pointing to an eternal peace.

This peace, this shalom that Jesus announces in their midst, is not just personal peace, it is the new reality of the Kingdom of God bought with the precious blood of Jesus.

That peace is God’s ultimate plan for humanity, and his whole created order and in this moment, Jesus announces it, and proves it by being physically present with these ten disciples. Jesus is clearly himself, obviously different being able to appear in rooms with locked doors, but unmistakably the Risen Lord.

And, bringing this peace, while pointing them back to what he’s done on the cross, and assuring them of the eternal future that lies before them, Jesus gives them a mandate in the rest of what he says.

‘As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.’

And with that he breathed and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

When we slow down and consider these verses, we can be left scratching our heads. There seems to be something a bit jarring. How can it be that Jesus tells them to receive the Holy Spirit before the Spirit is poured out at Pentecost?

Is this a contradiction in the text between John and Luke?

Not at all. The breathing doesn’t seem to be Jesus directly giving them the Holy Spirit, their lives carry on much as before.

What kind of disciples would we expect to see, if they were given the Holy Spirit by Jesus at this point?

Would it be disciples who are still behind locked doors because of fear a week later (v.26)

Would it be disciples who slide back to their old employment instead of sharing the Good News (21:3)

Or disciples who continue to make petty comparisons of their earthly credit before Jesus to see who will receive honour in his Kingdom?
(21:20-22)

That doesn’t sound like Spirit filled life does it?

It doesn’t fit with the transformed people we see in the Book of Acts and beyond who powerfully witness with joy, in the face of opposition and oppression after receiving the Holy Spirit at Pentecost; so what is happening?

Their task, the reason they will receive the Spirit, poured out at Pentecost, is so that they might proclaim the forgiveness of sins, through Jesus Christ. Jesus is signaling, symbolically what will happen after they receive the Spirit.

Sin will still be absolved by the atoning death of Jesus alone; none but him will forgive, but they are being sent to proclaim that forgiveness and in so doing make others conscious of their sin. The heartbeat of these few words echoes John 15:22 where Jesus said 'If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin.'

J Marsh helps unpack something that could be confusing 'the reference (in v.23) is to forgiving sins, or withholding forgiveness. But though this sounds stern and harsh, it is simply the result of the preaching of the gospel, which either brings men to repent as they hear of the ready and costly forgiveness of God, or leaves them unresponsive to the offer of forgiveness which is the gospel, and so they are left in their sins.'

Those who reject the message of Salvation in Christ alone, do not stand forgiven. In this mandate, the disciples are being reminded by Jesus what their core business is to be, and why they will be given the gift of the Holy Spirit, to proclaim Salvation in Christ Alone.

We share that mandate. If we are following Jesus and building community, this is the foundation on which we build. To follow him is to tell people this same message; as we take risks and share what we have graciously received. To Build community is to grow deeper, to walk together as we see people respond to that message and to share in the peace which we've received ourselves.

Not everyone will believe. But some will.

Thomas only believed after seeing Jesus face to face. His unbelief, after rejecting the witness of the other disciples in v.25 is changed, and he makes a stunning confession of who Jesus is v.28 'My Lord and my God'. The evidence is beyond doubt. Thomas must believe, and accept that Jesus truly is the Lord of all. The one who died, and who has been raised bodily, from the dead.

It is that belief, the belief which John desperately wants us to grasp at the end of v.31 'that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name' which we have been mandated to share, it is that belief which means everything has changed.

And this change, the promise of eternal peace with God, through the forgiveness of sin is an even greater change, and even bigger shift than saying I do, or the birth of a child; our reality is altered and we become the very children of God, given his spirit, and empowered that we might be able to share the forgiveness of sin, salvation itself, and the ability to enter into a new and right relationship with our loving Holy God.

That's quite a task Church, why don't we pray and ask God to help us?

Heavenly Father we are so thankful that we have found peace with you through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. As he brings us peace, everything is changed. We pray that you would help us by the power of your Holy Spirit to live out our mandate, as sharers of that same good news, that we can be saved by the lord Jesus alone. Give us courage where we are weak, dispel our fears as you stand in our midst so that your Kingdom would grow. We ask it in Jesus' name and for his glory. Amen.