

Welcome to our Easter morning service. May Jesus Christ be praised. Our Lord Jesus died, was buried and according to the Scriptures, rose again. Shall we seek God's face in prayer...

“Eternal God in heaven we thank you for our Saviour. We thank you that this day we celebrate his triumph over the grave. We thank you Heavenly Father that even this morning the risen Christ can be amongst us in our homes. We pray all that you might draw near to us, and we pray that you would reveal the things of God to us. Open our minds and our hearts that we would understand the word of God. Father we praise you, that Lord, on this day throughout the world Christians are gathering; millions of people to give you the praise that is due your name. We thank you that Lord you are satisfied with the payment that your Son made upon the cross. We thank you that he paid for our sins in full. And Lord we thank you that he has been raised for our justification. As we worship you this day, as we sing your praises, Lord, we join with the angels in heaven and the church worldwide as well as the church triumphant up in glory with You. We pray heavenly Father that we would indeed have a new experience of you. We pray that, Lord, we would have a fresh vision of our Saviour this morning. We pray that you would do our souls good. We pray heavenly Father that we would receive the Word of God and Father that you would speak to each person who is listening to this message this morning. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen”.

Sermon

Well this morning I'm going to begin a new series called “**Behind closed door**” and the first situation that we're going to look at is the disciples behind locked doors on the occasion when the risen Christ appeared to them. So please, would you open your Bible with me to John's Gospel chapter 20, and we're going to read from verse 19 to verse, 29. Shall we hear God's word.

John 20:19-29 *Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, “Peace be with you.”* ²⁰ *When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.* ²¹ *So Jesus said to them again, “Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.”* ²² *And 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 *Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ The other disciples therefore said to him, “We have seen the Lord.” So he said to them, “Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.”* ²⁶ *And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, “Peace to you!”* ²⁷ *Then He said to Thomas, “Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.”* ²⁸ *And Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!”* ²⁹ *Jesus said to him. “Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”* So reads the Holy Word of God.

Friends sometimes our plans just don't work out. Jenny and myself next week were due to take a flight off to a location where we could celebrate Jenny's 50th birthday.... going away just for a few days in the Easter holidays, but it's now all cancelled. Then at the end of the month I had a flight to Glasgow booked to speak at a UFM missionary conference in Scotland in Pitlochry, and that's no longer on. I have a trip booked to Mozambique in July. Who knows whether or not it will go ahead and then we have a booking for a summer holiday. Everything is on hold, isn't it? You see we make plans, but it's the Lord who determines the outcome. In James we read this. “*Now come now you who say today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow.... Instead, you ought to say, if the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.*” Our plans can be easily thwarted. It is the Lord's will and his plans that will prevail. Now it can be very hard for some people. My situation is a minor inconvenience. But there are people who are planning weddings! We think of Henry's brother, and the booking of all their family to go out to the States.... that's a difficult situation to be when all the family's looking forward to it. A wedding of a lifetime. The young couple who are yearning to be married and everything's off. But there are even harder situations than that.... Somebody has a terrible accident, and as a result of that accident life is put on

standstill. Or somebody has an awful disease and as a result of that all the hopes for their future are dashed. Well, in this passage that we're reading today, we are reminded that the disciples had many hopes, and many aspirations, and many dreams. Their belief was that Jesus was their Messiah and their Lord. They given up everything to follow Him, they'd even given up their livelihoods. He was their all in all, and all their hopes were now suddenly dashed. They were feeling terribly guilty. In his hour of greatest need they'd abandoned him. Peter denied him, and they were feeling shame, and a feeling tremendous disorientation and confusion. What had happened? They had hoped that the nation of Israel would turn to Christ and he would be their mighty deliverer, but instead the nation had crucified Jesus of Nazareth. You know, friends sometimes you and I have great hopes and aspirations and things just don't work out. We become as a result disorientated, disillusioned, discouraged, and depressed. At such times we need to remember that our Lord God has greater and higher purposes that we often cannot see.

Now John 20 recalls the instance when the Lord Jesus, our Risen Lord Jesus Christ, appeared to His disciples behind locked doors. Look at 19: *“Then the same day the evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut, where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews and Jesus came.”* They were frightened. They were concerned that the temple police would come after them, and so they had taken keys to lock the doors. Previously, they'd been in their own homes. We read that in verse 11. *“Then the disciples went away again to their own homes”*. They'd stayed in various homes and lodgings around Jerusalem. But now they gather together to confer, and to pray. But they were in a frightened state. They are concerned that the temple police will find them and take them and bring them before the Romans and maybe they will be put in prison or even worse maybe they too would be executed. It is at this point, behind those locked doors, that the risen Christ appears. He has a physical body. It's a glorious physical body, it's physical but he's different, and he's just come through those locked doors miraculously. He appears before them. And he brings some words of comfort. On that night, twice He said to them PEACE. *“Peace be with you”*. Verse 19. *“Peace to you”*. Verse 21. Our Lord Jesus does not speak words of rebuke initially (We read in another gospel later that he does upbraid them, he does speak to their unbelief. But here in the Gospel of John, the emphasis is upon his gracious kind words of comfort.) He doesn't say “Why did you abandon me? He doesn't say why did you not believe my clear teaching? He doesn't scold them. Rather, he assures them of PEACE. And then he does something. He shows them his hands and his side... He does something tangible visible in order they would have a further assurance in their hearts that he had risen from the dead and all is well. And then he gives them hope by reorienting them and telling them he will still use them and send them out into this world. So this morning we're going to look at three things:

1. From perturbation to peace.
2. From disorientation to direction.
3. From confusion, to commission.

We're going to concentrate on verses 19 to 23.

1. From perturbation to peace.

They were in a state of great shock. They were in a state of trauma. Their Saviour, their Lord had been taken by wicked hands had been cruelly beaten and executed. This had brought a toll upon them. They were utterly bewildered. On this day the women had been to the tomb, they had got up early to embalm the body of the Lord Jesus and had come back with report. They said that two angels had appeared to them. And the angels had given them a message that He was not there but had risen. And they were to bring this message to the disciples, but the disciples did not believe. Luke chapter 24, and verse 11 tells us that they thought these women were telling idle tales, fairy tales. And then on that same day Peter and John, two of the disciples, had run to the tomb. Peter had gone in and he'd seen the linen cloths, which the Lord Jesus Christ had been wrapped up in. They were lying in a neat pile in the tomb. He marvelled. He didn't seem to understand what that meant but he marvelled. He knew something had happened, but did not know what. John also went in and we read that he believed. But it seems that if he did not fully believe or at least if he really believed that Christ had risen from the dead, he kept that to himself. You see now there's 10 of them. Thomas is not there, Judas has hung himself and 10 are found in this locked room. And they ALL are in this position of bewilderment, and perturbation. Furthermore, later on that same day Luke chapter 24 tells us that two other

disciples had come to tell them that they'd met the risen Christ and that he's revealed himself to them. As he stayed in their home and as he broke bread suddenly they had a revelation that this is the risen Christ. So they've rushed back as quickly as possible to tell the others. They've got to Jerusalem late in the evening and they've told the disciples about it... but yet they still the ten will not believe. You see all their hopes have been dashed. They cannot believe and they will not believe. And they are frightened for their very lives.

Friends, isn't it wonderful that the Lord Jesus comes to such frightened disciples, and he tells them: "Peace. Peace be with you." Now that isn't just a mere greeting. He's actually imparting and giving peace to their souls. He's declaring "All is Well"... 'You may be feeling frightened, you may be feeling deeply guilty and ashamed of the way in which you've acted. But I'm speaking peace into your souls. I've died upon the cross as a champion as a warrior. I've cried, "It is finished"... I've paid for the sins of my people... I've paid for your sins.... You are reconciled to God, you are friends of the living God.... All is well, peace, my friends.' "Shalom" is a Hebrew word, meaning "inner contentment"; "a feeling of well-rounded peace" It is this peace and assurance that He gives to them. Now brothers and sisters... this week some who've been through the coronavirus intensive care units have come out and have spoken about how doctors or nurses have given them reassurance in their hour of need. One man on a ventilator the other day was saying that one of the doctors just woke him up every 24 hours, looked him dead in the eye and just said "This is what we do." In this way he gave him confidence, but at the same time the man confessed that he was deeply, deeply afraid. But the Lord Jesus comes to his disciples who are in great fear of their lives. He doesn't just say, "Well, I know what I'm doing". He says, "I impart peace to you." Christian friend you may know this peace, you may feel this peace, because you have peace with God. My friend maybe you're overwhelmed by troubles, maybe you're overly concerned.... Maybe you're burdened, and maybe things have been going from bad to worse this week. Maybe you've been just looking at the news, and the whole thing is going around in your mind and you're fearful. Oh that this day the risen Christ would come to you, and you would know that if you've trusted in him for your salvation **you're a friend God**, and He offers you his peace to reign in your heart. How gracious is our Saviour. Unbelief and fear are the stimulants, and the causes of all perturbation and disturbance of heart. Did you know that doubt and fear go hand in hand and that any of our fears are ungrounded? JC Ryle once said that two thirds of our fears are unnecessary for the thing never comes to pass, and two thirds of our tears are unnecessary. So do we simply worry in a crisis, or shall we not trust in Jesus who is an ever present Saviour? So Jesus reassures his disciples, and they go from a state of perturbation to a state of settled peace. But secondly, let's now consider from disorientation to direction.

2. From disorientation to direction

The disciples were totally disorientated: "What next?" was their question... They given up their livelihoods, and they had followed Christ for three years. What would happen now? Where would they go? Should they go back to their livelihoods? Would they be accepted? What did the future hold for them? Was it even worth carrying on in life? Everything seemed pointless....And so after speaking peace to them the first thing the Lord Jesus did was something tangible. Yes he's spoken words of peace, but now he will reassure them by doing something: "*Look at my hands, & look at my side*". The side was important. You see, every crucified person's hands and feet were pierced. But there was only one who had a pierced side & that was the Lord Jesus. The soldiers had plunged that spear into his side, proving that he was truly dead for blood and water flowed out. For this reason they didn't need to break his legs like they did to the others (the two criminals). So He showed them his hands and his side... "Yes, it's me. And this is me in the flesh, with a glorified body. I have been raised from the dead." So He gives them something tangible and later he will say to Thomas, "Well put your fingers in my wounds, my hands and in my side... actually touch me Thomas!" He will also eat fish. He's giving them something tangible that they can see and touch in order to strengthen their faith.

Isn't the Lord wonderful? Sometimes God has uses tangible situations to strengthen the hearts of his people. Some people have been at a communion service and it's when they've seen the breaking of the bread. and when they've seen the cup. And in the stillness and quietness of that hour they remember the Lord Jesus, and all that he's done for them that they've known touches of God, touches the Holy Spirit. There's something tangible there that's helped them. Sometimes the Lord comes to us. And he understands our disorientation. Maybe we're in an awful financial predicament, and you know, God not only speaks words to us from the Bible but he may use somebody to provide money for us... It's some tangible. Or maybe we're in another

situation. We're in a situation of great sadness and sorrow and feeling lonely. And the Lord uses something tangible, not only reading the Bible or hearing the word preach but somebody comes and they say something to us. This lifts our souls. They put their arm around us. The Lord does something... maybe it's a letter that comes through the door. The words are so encouraging for us. Our God is gracious, when we are disorientated He knows how to put us back on our feet and give us direction.

Now, our one aim is to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ. He knew too that this was the desire and the goal of these disciples. And so it gives them clear direction to help them do this. He says to them... Verse, 21 "*Peace to you. As the Father has sent me. I also send you.*" Maybe they're thinking of going back to their professions, but I say "NO".... You may feel failures. You may feel weak. You may feel disorientated, but just as the Father has divinely commissioned me and send me into a world which is a hard, a world of rejection and pain and suffering... So I am sending you. You will know my peace, but it won't be a bed of roses, it will be sacrifice. As the Father sent me into the world that will reject me, so I'm sending you... but listen I'm sending you... I'm sending you out!! You have a purpose. You desire to glorify Me & I will give you that wonderful opportunity to serve me by spreading the word of God, sending you out into this world. You see they go from disorientation to direction. The Lord clearly shows them the way that they will go.

My friends some of you may feel failures. Some of you may feel weak and maybe restricted in what you can do. You feel unable and very fearful. Well here are the disciples. They're restricted and behind locked doors. You know, that's no barrier to the Lord... your weakness and your restrictions are no barrier to Him. He asks you to turn your eyes away from the difficulties, and to fix your eyes upon him. He will give you direction. If you trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding but in all your ways acknowledge Him He shall direct your paths, He shall... just as he directed the disciples paths. And then lastly:

3. From confusion, to commission

From confusion to commission; from anxiety to authority. Yes from their position of confusion and anxiety He's going to commission them with authority. Now the disciples may have wondered what authority they had to go out into this world. So the Lord Jesus Christ does two things. In verse 22, we read that he breathes on them and says receive the Holy Spirit. This is quite remarkable. At this time, when we're thinking of people breathing upon another person we only think of that in terms of the danger. But this was different. The Lord Jesus again did something physical: He breathed upon them and his breath went upon them. Now that breath wasn't just symbolic. He was saying "I actually give you the Holy Spirit. I give you the third person of the Trinity. I, the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity say to you receive the Holy Spirit for He is the breath of God and so I breathe upon you and give you him. Not something purely symbolic, but there was an actual receiving of the Holy Spirit. Now, of course, this was a pledge of something greater that would come. Jesus would soon tell them that they were to wait in Jerusalem for the Spirit to come. God would give them another comforter. They would not be left as orphans. They were to wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit's had been poured out from heaven, and then they would be given power to be witnesses to him. So what was this then? What was this gift if this wasn't the full endowment of the Holy Spirit?

Well, I believe, if we read, Luke chapter 24 verses 45 which refers to the same night we will understand. We learn that Jesus said received the Holy Spirit and breathed on them in order that they might understand the scriptures. "*He opened their understanding that they might comprehend the scriptures.*" And as he taught he showed them that he must suffer and die and that He had to rise from the dead. He taught them from all the Old Testament Scriptures the truth of his suffering, of his death and his resurrection, and he opened their minds to understand it. And their hearts, I'm sure, burned within them just like those two who were on the road to Emaus. See the Lord Jesus Christ was now preparing them for greater works to come and so taking them from confusion to commission. They might say "But how can we go out? how can we be sent out? How will it happen?"... "Well I'm commissioning you and giving you my Holy Spirit who will give you a greater understanding of the things of God. And then at Pentecost, the Spirit of God will come in all of his fullness; all of his bounty, all of his liberty, all of his power. He will come and give you such an ability to preach the gospel that many will be converted through you." But before then there was a touch of that, even now a giving of the Spirit.

And then in verse 23 he says something quite remarkable. *“If you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven them. If you retain the sins of any they are retained”*. These words are not to be misunderstood. No not at all. This isn't the doctrine that is held in one of the denominations which says that a priest has the power to declare a person forgiven if that person confesses to him, or the priest has power to say, ‘Your sins are not forgiven’ if the person doesn't confess those sins. He is in fact saying that on the basis and terms of the gospel, the terms of salvation, the apostles could declare forgiveness, or retention of sin. What do I mean by that? Well, they are to preach that in order to be saved you have to believe that Jesus Christ died upon the cross for you. That he paid for your sins as the Son of God, and that he rose from the dead. You need to believe that and you need to turn from sin and repent. Now if you accept the terms of the gospel, the terms of salvation which are repentance and faith; faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and repentance towards God, then the gospel preachers have all the authority in the world to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven.’ But if a person denies the gospel message and does not repent, then all gospel ministers have the authority to say, on the basis of the Word of God, you are condemned and your sins are retained. You see the Lord Jesus Christ was commissioning them and he was giving them authority, to go in his name and in his power. They were now coming from a state of confusion into a state of authority, being commissioned to go out and preach his name.

This morning, we've seen a very tender and kind and gentle Saviour. Three times in fact in the passage that we read earlier he speaks PEACE. We've considered two words of Peace. Verse 19 *“Peace be with you”*. And then verse. 21. *“Peace to you”*. And then we read further down in verse 26 (when Jesus comes to them after eight days) He says, again to His disciples who are behind closed doors. *“Peace to you”*. What about you? Do you know the peace of God that passes all understanding? Life is very fragile and the world is interested in peace. But he cannot give lasting peace. The world's peace is to do with tolerance; it is to do without with just getting on with people, nations getting on well. The United Nations is set up in order to try and establish peace between the nations and it happens for a time and then there's wars. But it can't give an inner second peace. Only Christ can give this peace. John chapter 14 verse 27, *“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you, not as a world gives do I give you. Let not your heart be troubled. Let it not be afraid.”* This is the peace of Christ. It's not like the world's peace, it's not just putting up with people, tolerating people having a pact or a contract or just getting along nicely. No it is not outward formalised peace. Rather it is spiritual. It begins with peace with God, because you've know your sins forgiven. And then you enjoy the peace of God in your heart even though you live in a troubled world. So Christ says if you know that peace *“Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid”*. Today we're behind closed doors were in lockdown. And my first message about being behind closed doors is this: In the quietness of your house and in the quietness of your heart you can experience the peace of Christ. But maybe your heart is locked to the Saviour. Maybe you've been distanced from him. And you hear him knocking at the door of your heart. He's knocking at the door of your heart. He wants to fellowship with you. You're his child; you believe in him. You've trusted in him. And he's knocking at the door of your heart. Oh that you would turn to him and open your heart, and have fellowship with Him, the risen Lord Jesus Christ. This Easter Sunday may be a good day for you, a blessed day. May God encourage your heart and your soul. Well, I'm going to bow in a small word of prayer and encourage you to close by singing that triumphant hymn on the resurrection of Christ; *“Thine be the glory risen conquering Son.”* Shall we pray:

“Loving Heavenly Father, we thank you for our Lord Jesus. We thank you for his amazing love. Thank you for his great grace. Thank you Lord for His kindness that he came to those 10 disciples in all their doubts and all their dismay, and he not only gave them peace but he reoriented them and gave them direction and commissioned them. And we pray heavenly Father that again He will come to us and He will strengthen us. And you'll see to it that each one of us are useful. Lord, our fears are no barriers to you, no barriers to you. We thank you that you can change fear and bring us to a position of faith and trust. We thank you that our weakness is no barrier to you because you love to use weak creatures like ourselves. So Father, come to us this day, and use us for Your glory. Forgive us for many sins we pray in Jesus name.”