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## Defiant Hope: Hope for the Hunkered Down John 20: 19-29

Listen...at some point, you've just got to laugh, right? We need to keep our sense of humor! I'm Pastor Mark and I'm so glad that, even though YOU are "stayin' inside, stayin' inside...", you have joined your Chapel Hill family to celebrate the day that changed forever! A day that started in despair and ended in triumph! Whether you are a regular or are joining us for the first time, we welcome you to this celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ...a virtual Easter, no less! Who would have believed it?

But listen...this will end! Someday, we will be back together. Someday the president will say, "The battle is won! You may leave your homes! Go back to work! Go to church. Go to restaurants. It is perfectly safe!"

That will be a great day, won't it? And that day **will** come. But imagine this: imagine that blessed day DOES come...and **yet thousands remain in their homes**. Doors locked. Unwilling to leave. Hunkered down... even though they've received incredible good news! It's hard to imagine, isn't it?

But...that's EXACTLY what happened on that first Easter Sunday. Mary Magdalene came to the tomb of Jesus. The stone was rolled away, the tomb was empty, the angels announced that Jesus was alive! She rushed to tell the disciples. Peter and John rushed back to the empty tomb to see for themselves! And later, Jesus appeared to Mary in the flesh!

That's the good news of Easter! Jesus was alive! Mary saw him and believed. Peter and John saw the empty tomb. At least John believed! Now... you'd think they'd go back and spread the word! And you'd think the rest of the disciples would be emboldened! Cheered by the good news! But it didn't turn out that way at all. Listen to what happened that very Easter night. John 20:19-29

**On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."**

Easter Sunday night the disciples were together. And what's the first detail that John tells us about that gathering? **The doors were locked.** Why? Because they still feared the religious leaders...the ones who had orchestrated the death of Jesus. Now wait a minute! Isn't Jesus alive? Didn't Mary see him? Didn't John believe? If Jesus is powerful enough to defeat death...why the locked doors? Why should his disciples be afraid of anyone...or anything?

But they are. Terrified. **Locked in. Hunkered down. Hiding out.** And it was to those terrified, hunkered-down disciples that Jesus appeared. The Greek says that they were "ecstatic!" Beside themselves with joy to see that Jesus WAS alive...just as he promised! Even DEATH could not keep him down! Nothing would ever be the same again! These men were going to walk out of that room emboldened...empowered. Right? **Not right!** Listen to verse 26:

**Eight days later, his disciples were inside again...Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."**

One week later... on the next Sunday night...they are gathered again. **And what's the first detail we learn about that second gathering?** **They are behind locked doors.** Again. **Hunkered down.** Again. Because...they are afraid. Again.

**Come on!** We can understand how they might be terrified on Easter night. After all, none of the disciples had actually **seen** Jesus yet. Mary had... but I'm afraid they didn't give much credit to the testimony of a woman. **BUT then...Jesus showed up!** In the flesh! He even **showed** them his wounds to prove that he was alive. **And remember... they were ecstatic!** Surely THAT experience would take away their fear and embolden them to trust Jesus.

But a week later, there they are! **Still** locked down, still hunkered down, still frightened. **How is that possible?** To have such faith in Jesus...and such fear...all at the same time?

Well...you tell me, Chapel Hill. How is that possible? Aren't we all living that same tension right now? Hunkered down. Behind locked doors. Avoiding others. Fearful. **And yet...we say we believe in Jesus.** We trust that he is in control. We know everything will turn out all right. We, too...all of us... are living in this combination of fear and faith, aren't we? So...what can we do to boost faith...and crush fear?

Every morning for the past weeks I have been drinking a packet of Emergen-C. You know, that combination of vitamins that you mix into a glass of fizzy orange goodness. Dr Oz tells me that a shot of Vitamin C is a good way to boost my immune system. I already have an immune system... but I want to make it stronger!

And that's what I want to do this Easter morning with our faith...with our hope. I want to boost them... build them up... so that as days and weeks pass, faith will continue to crush fear...in

defiant hope. There are three things Jesus offers his disciples on that first Easter night...and on this Easter morning: his presence, his peace and his power.

First, Jesus offers his presence. **He shows up.** Twice! Jesus joins **them** in their isolation. **This is so kind of the Lord.** He doesn't say, "Suck it up, you weenies. Crawl out of your hole. I'm going to be at the temple at 9:00 a.m....and I'll meet you there. If you want to see me, you need to man up!" No...Jesus in his grace...meets them right where they are: in their fear and isolation. **In fact, they couldn't stop him if they tried!** The doors are locked but somehow, miraculously, Jesus passes right through them.

And **not only** does he come to them, both stories tell us literally that Jesus was **right in the middle of them...**that's the Greek phrase that was used. Do you remember the TV show "Malcolm in the Middle?" Well...this story might be titled "Jesus in the Middle."

Locked doors don't keep Jesus out. Quarantines don't keep Jesus out. A restriction on large groups doesn't keep Jesus out. Our fear and doubts and anxieties... even THEY don't keep Jesus out. **He comes to us, even in our isolation!** He moves toward us. He says, "Listen...I will do whatever is necessary to help you trust me. I want you to realize that nothing...no virus, no lock down, no social distancing, no stock market swoon... nothing can stop me from coming to you!"

And the **real key** to finding hope in this moment...is not just in allowing Jesus in; it is inviting him **RIGHT INTO THE MIDDLE.** Of your life, your family, your new schedule, your plans, your setbacks, your conversations. Not out on the edges. Not tucked into the religious corner he ordinarily occupies in your life. Jesus... smack dab in the middle. That...is the recipe for hope!

Right now...wherever you are...even if you are by yourself... you are not, in fact, by yourself. Jesus is with you. He promised he would **NEVER** leave us, **NEVER** forsake us. The first gift Jesus offers to the hunkered-down is the gift of his Presence.

And then... he offers his Peace. In both encounters, the very **FIRST** words out of his mouth were, "Shalom a lechem. Peace be with you." In fact, that first night...when they were still freaking out at the sight of Jesus, he says it twice. "Shalom! Shalom!" Relax!

Do you know the most frequent command in the Bible? Fear not! It appears more than 80 times. Every time an angel shows up in the Bible...like in the skies of Bethlehem on Christmas Eve...every time, they say the same thing. "Fear not." Of course it never works! It was always a waste of angelic breath. They are always terrified when angels show up. But that **negative command**, "Fear not..." was the best the Bible could offer.

**Until Jesus came along.** Jesus doesn't just tell us not to be afraid. **Jesus gives us peace.** HIS peace. Only Jesus can do that! The Bible calls him the Prince of Peace. Jesus promised, "Peace I leave you. My peace I give unto you." Jesus is the giver of peace.

And here's the thing: **you can have fear...and peace...**at the same time. Fear is a normal response to frightening things. And we live in frightening times. **Anxiety**, however, is fear out of control. Anxiety turns fear into a kind of prayer... a kind of meditation...where we think about, worry about, focus on, mull on, stew on the thing that frightens us... to the point that we have no room left in our soul for hope.

When Jesus says "Peace be with you," he's not just speaking hopeful, positive words. **He is pronouncing a blessing of shalom upon us.** He is infusing us with peace. He is injecting us with peace! He is saying, "**I know you are afraid... but my peace is greater than your crisis.** I am here...right in the middle of this with you...and you can count on me to **be your peace.** Trust that. Believe that. Live that."

During this virus season, I think we ought to greet one another with the pronouncement of Jesus! "Shalom. Shalom lechem." Why not speak these words to each other right now? Go ahead. And why not offer that blessing at least once a day to every member of your household...and beyond! Shalom. The peace of Christ be with you!

Jesus offers the gift of his presence, he offers his peace and finally, he offers his POWER. And he does so in the oddest way. As he was standing there...remember, the Greek says he was smack dab in the middle of them...he did this. (Spin around and breathe). He breathed on them! And then he said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

The Holy Spirit is not just an invisible power for good...like the Force in Star Wars. The Holy Spirit is God...without flesh! Jesus promised he would never leave them or forsake them. So when he returned to heaven, this is how he kept that promise. The Holy Spirit of Jesus: living in us... guiding us, strengthening us, forgiving us, delivering us, empowering us. Jesus breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

**I can't help but wonder... how would that go over today?** If I were to do this (breathe) in a crowded room...people would freak out! Cyndi and I have been walking a lot recently and as we meet others on the sidewalks, we practice social-distancing. We even move out into the street sometimes. Mostly, it is done in good humor. We nod and laugh and greet each other.

But the other day, as I approached a woman, she moved quickly out into the street away from me, raised her shirt up over her nose and completely avoided my gaze! I felt like any moment she would pull out a crucifix, thrust it toward me and scream, "I abjure you, Spawn of Satan, be gone!" I wonder how she would have felt if I had leaned over at that moment and done this?  
BREATHE

All of us are convinced of the power of that invisible virus borne on the breath of others. A power of sickness and death. It is why we stay apart. It is why we wear masks. But I wonder...do we have as MUCH faith in the invisible, life-giving power of the Spirit? Do we understand... do

we believe... that Jesus wants to breathe his Spirit upon us even this day? To fill us with his power, his gifts, his courage, his healing, his contagious hope!

And did you notice what Jesus said as he breathed on them: “Receive the Holy Spirit!” Receive this great gift! The other morning while it was dark, I went into the kitchen to pour a mug of coffee. In this mug. As you will notice, this mug looks the same no matter which end is up. And...because it was dark... I didn’t notice that I had it upside down... until I started to pour! It wouldn’t have mattered how much I poured... that mug was not ready to receive what I wanted to give it.

The greatest gift Jesus offers to the hunkered-down...is the gift of his Holy Spirit. The gift of himself, living within us. If you are not yet a follower of Jesus, this is what it means to be a Christian! Jesus says, I want to fill you with my Spirit. I want to chase out your fear, your sin, your shame...whatever holds you in bondage. And I want to replace that with my **life-giving, hope-giving, guidance-giving** Holy Spirit. You may have joined today as a polite annual spectator. But as you listen, you find yourself saying, **“I need that! I cannot face this present moment without that power!”** Maybe this is the moment for you to receive the gift of the Spirit of Jesus...to become his follower.

Or maybe you are a Christian...but still living in fear, doubt, anxiety, despair. Well... you might need a refill! **Maybe you need to turn your cup over! This day...when Christ triumphed over the worst the world could throw at him...**perhaps this is the day for you to receive anew the life-giving breath of Christ. His breath of courage and hope and faith and power.

What better way to celebrate Easter than for all of us...wherever we are... from Olalla to Okinawa...for all of us receive the gracious gift of the Spirit of Jesus. (Guide...open hands... Come Holy Spirit). PRAY

Benediction. You know, there was one more gift that Jesus offered to the hunkered-down. He gave his presence, his peace, his power...**and he gave them purpose.** “As the Father Sends me, so send I you.” What? Really? Those frightened, hunkered down men were supposed to go out on the same mission as Jesus? It sure didn’t seem likely in that moment...hiding behind locked doors. But within weeks, the Holy Spirit came again... spectacularly, ...and fell upon them with such power that 3000 onlookers became believers...and the world-wide church of Jesus was launched!

Could you possibly believe that, even in your hunkered-down state—you are still on mission with Jesus? You have the time and technology to reach out, to share a link, to pray, to invite. I have never seen our people more courageous to share their faith than right now. You are all realizing, “This is life and death! I don’t have time to be shy or timid! I have the defiant hope of Christ living within me... I must share it with others!”

One of the greatest gifts of defiant hope...will be for you to discover that, even while you are hunkered down, you are on mission with Jesus.