

Session 14

May 31, 2020 (Pentecost)

Unit 2: Jesus Encounters . . .

Fear and Doubt

The Holy Spirit is God's promised presence during times of fear and doubt.

The Word

John 20:19-29

Engage the Word

Chapters 14—17 are a rich source of teachings, especially Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit (the "Advocate," one called alongside to help). Following an extended prayer, Jesus and the disciples moved to the Garden of Gethsemane where soldiers and officials took Jesus into custody (John 18). In chapter 19, Jesus is tried, crucified, and placed in a nearby tomb. John 13—19 provides important context for today's session in John 20. At this point the followers of Jesus were devastated, their dreams shattered, and they were grieving deeply. Fear and doubt were all they knew.

JESUS COMES TO ADDRESS THE DISCIPLES FEAR

John 20:19-20

On the "first day of the week" (20:1) Mary Magdalene had gone to the tomb, found that the large stone at the entrance was moved, and ran to report Jesus' absence to the disciples. Peter and John ran to the tomb, examined what was left of the burial items and in their confusion, fear, and doubt, returned to the house where they were staying (20:10), meeting behind locked doors, still fearful. Mary remained near the tomb and had a close encounter with the risen Jesus. She returned to tell the disciples "I have seen the Lord!" (20:18).

In the evening, perhaps 12 hours after 20:1, Jesus had appeared and was very much alive! This "first day" became the celebrated "resurrection day," or "Lord's Day" (Revelation 1:10), as the early Christians began to gather at a different time for worship of the living Lord, Jesus. (For the phrase "first day of the week" as a developing Christian time of worship see Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 16:2.) The Greek word *sabbaton*, which can mean "week," provides us with the word "sabbath." On that day fear still plagued the disciples. They gathered behind locked doors.

The tense of the verb has the sense of “had been locked previously and remained locked.” ? Despite the locked doors, out of fear of the Jews (the NIV translation “Jewish leaders” captures the intent), Jesus suddenly appeared in the middle of their gathering. Compare Revelation 5, where the resurrected Lord comes to quiet tears and fears, bringing assurance of His victory over death. Into a Jerusalem house laden with fears, Jesus appeared that “first day” and spoke peace to them (Hebrew “shalom”). In this passage, Jesus speaks peace to the disciples three times. His appearing brought great joy. But still the disciples needed more reassurance and empowerment.

JESUS COMMISSIONS

John 20:21-23

Jesus’ words of peace and His resurrection life powerfully testified to them. The impact would lead to a lifelong mission for the original disciples, and all who believe their testimony. Jesus had been sent by the Father. The tense of the verb “sent” carries the idea of a past event, with continuing effect. Jesus was saying that His mission, something received in the past, yet still held. He will continue ever and on as the sent one from the Father. Jesus remains the agent of the Father, speaking for the Father, representing the Father. The disciples find they too are sent ones, by Jesus’ clarion words “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” This sending includes an equipping of the disciples for the task ahead. Jesus conveyed the mission to the locked-in-by-fear disciples and promised the ministry of the Holy Spirit to empower them. Jesus would continue working through the Spirit. When Jesus breathed on that gathered group, this “breath” or “spirit” somewhat foreshadows the coming of the Holy Spirit as powerful “wind” that will be characteristic of the Christian mission. In Acts 1:8, the coming of the Holy Spirit is closely related to the advance of the gospel message by “power” so the disciples might be effective “witnesses.” In Acts, and in later Christian history, Jesus’ disciples would be closely and deeply involved in the forgiveness of sins and the restoration of those forgiven. Faithful preaching and teaching by them would herald the pardon, and the purity, that faith in Jesus would deliver to believing hearers. Jesus’ commission by the Spirit also no doubt intends the reader to recall the Genesis 2:7 creation language, where God’s breath infused life into the first man. In the resurrection appearance before us we find original creation imagery, also new creation to come (in the creation of a community based on belief in Jesus).

John 20:24-29

Thomas (the “twin,” Didymus), was absent when Jesus appeared previously. Ever the realist, Thomas insisted he would need more “hands on” evidence before he believed in a resurrected Jesus. Even in the face of Mary Magdalene’s “I have seen the Lord” (20:18), and the disciples “We have seen the Lord!” (20:25), Thomas waited to be convinced. Even with the previous appearances Jesus had made to them, the gathered disciples still met behind locked doors. As before, Jesus wasn’t there, and then seemingly the next moment He was! Jesus extended “peace” to all of them, as before. Then He turned His attention to Thomas, inviting Him to see and touch, and to move from doubt to faith. At that moment Thomas embraced the truth of Jesus as the living one, with no indication in the text that Thomas needed to see more, or to touch Jesus. Thomas declared his full faith in Jesus as “My Lord and my God!” The bestowal of God’s Spirit,

and the unmistakable presence of Jesus, with the clear commission from the Father, settled the matter. Fear and doubt gave way to faith.

Reflect

In what ways do you need to experience the filling of God's Spirit in your life this week?

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