

Easter: “Peace Be with You”

by John R. Mabry, PhD

The disciples must have felt that they had blown it, big time. Here they had given three years of their lives following a teacher that they feared had turned out to be a fraud. They must have relived much of their history together, armed now with a critical perspective they had lacked before. How could they have been so gullible? Jesus’ words had been revolutionary, certainly, but they were convincing at the time. Now they were not so sure.

The modern tragedies of Heaven’s Gate and the People’s Temple are not isolated incidents. People have always been taken in by a charismatic preacher and a fervent hope of a better world to come. And the disciples felt taken in. And now what did they have? They had one dead rabbi, a stolen body, a crazy colleague insisting that she saw Jesus risen from the dead, and half of the city in an uproar and on their tails. No wonder they holed up in fear! The disciples were afraid for their lives! After all, *they* killed Jesus, what was to say *they* wouldn’t stop there?

So they huddled there, feeling like failures, like dupes, like wanted men, like it was the end of the world. And then a familiar voice, saying, “Peace be with you.”

Peter must have jumped out of his shorts! Suddenly, Jesus, the old Jesus, in the flesh, was in the room with them, and telling them not to be afraid — to be at peace! There was no question that it was him. There were the wounds, and, well — it was *him*.

Imagine the feelings that must have been somersaulting through these guys! At one moment they were feeling like failures for having believed this Jesus guy at all. And the next moment, they were feeling like failures for *not* believing him! Imagine Peter, especially, who had denied him three times, and doubted like the rest of them whether they had just wasted the last three years of their lives. And now here was this same old Jesus, just like he said, inexplicably, miraculously amongst them again.

They must have felt ashamed, for Jesus to have found them huddling in a locked room, hiding from the world, trying to figure out what had gone wrong, where *they* had gone wrong, doubting his word, doubting themselves.

But Jesus was not angry. He did not condemn them. He didn’t yell at them or tell them they were



miserable excuses for disciples. Instead he said, “Peace be with you.” “Don’t be afraid, everything is going to be all right.”

And then he breathed on them the Holy Spirit, so they would never be alone again, so they would never need doubt God’s power and mission in their lives and in their ministries. Except for John, every one of the disciples went to their graves via a violent martyr’s death. This could not have happened on their own power. These guys were convinced: convinced by the living Christ breathing into their faces in a locked upper room; convinced by the nailprints in his hands and feet; convinced by the comforting stirrings of the Holy Spirit

of God burning in their breasts, stirring their courage, supplying their mouths with words, leading them into dangerous and fruitful ministries.

They did not face death because of some feel-good theology about things always looking better in the morning. They walked into their deaths with courage because they saw the victor over death, and received from his very mouth the same power and promise this Jesus possessed.

The disciples were convinced — and we are Christians today precisely because they were convincing! Because the power of Love was greater than their fear; because the power of Love was greater than their shame; because the power of Love was greater than their loss; because the power of Love had shattered death forever — and they knew it.

But on that night, in those frozen moments when they were paralyzed with their own doubt and fear, the power of Love was so great that it forgave them. The power of Love embraced them as they were, scared and hurting people, pulled them to Love’s breast and said, “Peace be with you.” The power of Love that knows what it is to be human, to be limited in our faith and knowledge, that knows what it is to despair

It is that power of Love that seeks us out today. Wherever we are holed up, wherever we are hiding, it is that power of Love that calls us each individually by name and tells us “no matter where you have been, no matter what you have done, no matter how far you have run or how overwhelming your fear: Peace be with you.” v

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