

*“In the Midst of Jesus”*  
John 20:19-22

There is a story about the Reformer Martin Luther going through a period of discouragement & depression. For days, his long face graced the family table and dampened the family’s home life. One day, his wife came to the table all dressed in black, as if she were going to a funeral. When Martin asked her who had died, she replied, “Martin, the way you’ve been acting lately, I thought God had died, so I came prepared to attend His funeral.” [P] Her gentle but effective rebuke drove straight to Luther’s heart. As a result, the great Reformer resolved never again to allow worldly care to defeat him. By God’s grace, he vowed he would submit his life to his Living Savior and that he would reflect that grace with a spirit of faith and gratitude, whatever came.

In these days that are often described as precarious, uncertain, scary ... we may be tempted to respond like the discouraged Luther, roaming our homes with faces downcast. But on this second Sunday of Easter, may we remember, and may we never forget, that our God did die – he lay lifeless in a cold tomb. [P] But He didn’t stay there! The tomb is empty. Because He is alive! This morning, let’s revel all the more in the Resurrection!

As our passage opens, it is now Sunday evening. It has just been days since the darkest, most devastating event of their lives. They are still in shock. Their world is still shattered. They are gathered in a house behind closed doors, anxious, worried, the walls closing in. Can you relate? [PAUSE] But then, all of a sudden, Jesus is there with them! They are in the presence of their living Lord! If you think about it, that house was the first church building where the resurrected Lord was *in the midst* of His people!

That is at the core of our Christian faith: “*Jesus in our midst.*” We’ve known his presence in years past, we will experience his presence in any uncertain days to come, and we trust in his presence in this moment as well. We are not alone. We are never alone. The Risen Jesus is our help and our hope – the One who offers his grace & provision to us every day, every hour, every breath we take ... He is in our midst.

Our prayers, our cries for help, our weak murmurs, our thank yous & our Amens, are not simply messages sent off to a distant God. No, we experience the imminence of God (*cherished nearness*) here & now – in the place where you find yourself. In the midst of our world in crisis – in the midst of our times of struggle and uncertainty – in the midst of doubts, fear, even loss, Jesus is there – the love of God enfleshed & resurrected!

“Jesus in our midst.” If we look closely, we will see Him there through all the pages of Scripture. At the very beginning, Jesus was in the midst as the creative Word. As a babe, Jesus was in the midst of the shepherds. As a boy, He was in the midst of the teachers in the temple. At Calvary, Jesus was in the midst of sinners. John 19:18 – “*They crucified him, and two others with him, one on each side, and Jesus in the midst.*” And on the evening of that first Easter Sunday, Jesus stood “*in the midst*” of His disciples.

Why do we see this theme repeated again & again? [P] Because it’s at the heart of the Christian life! It’s at the heart of our fellowship *as* the Church. It’s at the heart of our witness. As we gather in worship, even now, our deepest desire is that Jesus will be in our midst! And as we serve, in unique ways in unique times, we must continue to seek the Jesus who is in our midst. [P] Let’s consider what happens when Jesus is in the midst.

I. JESUS IN THE MIDST WILL MAKE US **PEACEFUL** (19). Philippians 4:7 – “*And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts*

*and minds in Christ Jesus.*” God’s peace goes far beyond what we can handle. Have you ever considered the paradoxical blessing that is often found when our problems are so great that we can’t possibly solve them? Now, don’t misunderstand me. I’m not saying we are to be delighted about the many troubles that cross our path and that plague our world. I’m saying we should be glad that they are more than *we* can handle. Why? Because when we finally realize we can’t carry the weight of the world, we’ve taken the first step in overcoming fear and bringing the peace of Christ into our hearts and minds.

Remember a certain promise Jesus gave on the night he would be abandoned by those he loved, arrested by those intent on killing him – a promise offered just before his bitter prayer in the Garden – a promise focused on comforting his disciples while fully aware of the darkness to come – the ridicule, torture and agonizing death he would experience when he took on our sinfulness at the cross ... What promise? This promise: *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”* (Jn. 14:27)

And then he stresses it again in their final moments together: *“A time is coming and in fact has come when you will be scattered, each to your own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me. 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.”* (John 16:32-33). And with that, he willingly enters the greatest darkness any one has ever known.

And if that’s not enough to make you marvel at your Messiah, consider this: These words to his disciples – this promise of peace – were his last words to them before his death. [P] Then come the longest, darkest days of their lives. Even with Jesus’

promise to them, they don't feel peace – they feel fear. They don't know hope – they know despair. That's because a promise of peace from a dead, defeated Messiah isn't good enough ... But witness this with me!

Verse 19 – *“While the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders (the weight of their world crushing in), Jesus came and stood among them (perhaps the most reviving moment in human hearts in all of history). And without even a pause in the scene, Jesus speaks. And what does He say? “PEACE be with you!”* And in that moment – all fear, all despair ... gone.

How can we know that we can rely on his promise, that we can rest in his peace? The very next verse gives the answer – v. 20 – *“After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord!”* Come, see, I am alive! And because I live, you also will live! Do not let your hearts be troubled! I have overcome the world! [P] The Risen Jesus was in their midst! And wonder of wonders, He is in our midst as well! [Pause] Jesus in the midst will make us PEACEFUL.

II. JESUS IN THE MIDST WILL MAKE US **PURPOSEFUL**. After proclaiming peace, Jesus utters a charge: *“As the Father has sent me, I am sending you”* (21). We are to be a mouth to speak for Jesus; hands to work for Jesus; a heart to love for Jesus. Let's be more specific: We need mouths to sing out His praises! Mouths to invite others to witness what God is doing *in our midst*. Mouths to tell a desperate world about Jesus – who he is, what he's done, and how we are to now live for him, with joy and hope.

We need hands that serve, that write notes, that pray for the hurting, discouraged & overwhelmed. We need hands that open the Word. If I had a glove and said, "Glove, pick up that Bible," could it do it? No? I'll try again, "I apologize, Mr. Glove, I haven't

told you how to pick up the Bible. Put your thumb on top, the fingers underneath, squeeze tight, and lift." Will anything happen? No. Because the glove is powerless. The glove is empty of life. I could say to the glove again and again, "Pick up the Bible," but it could never do it – not until I put my hand into the glove. The moment my hand is in it, the glove becomes as strong as my hand. Everything possible for my hand becomes possible for the glove. You are the glove; Christ is the hand. *"As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."* [Pause] Jesus in the midst will make us PURPOSEFUL.

III. JESUS IN THE MIDST WILL MAKE US **POWERFUL**. *"And with that, Jesus breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (22).* This verse harkens us back to the story of creation. Gen. 2:7 – *"The Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and he became a living being."* The Bible has much to say about breath. Job 19:17 – *"My breath is offensive to my wife; I am loathsome to my own brothers."* Okay, that one I threw in for fun (Now, you may not have laughed, but remember, I'm hear telling jokes to an empty sanctuary!) Our breath may sometimes be powerful, but not in the way God's breath is powerful!

In Ezekiel 37, we see the dry bones of a battlefield come together as skeletons, and then muscle and skin, but they lay there like corpses until v. 9 – *"Then the Lord said to me, 'Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live.' So I prophesied as He commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet – a vast army."* [P]

And now we see the breath of God in our resurrection passage. Jesus tells his disciples that he is sending them to serve and witness to His resurrection. But he doesn't

send them unequipped. He doesn't send them alone. He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." This was a promise pointing to what would happen 50 days later on Pentecost, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The disciples needed God's help to carry out the commission they had just been given – and that help was the Spirit of God dwelling within them like the breath of life.

This empowering of the Spirit is true for every believer; it is available to all of us. That's what's so wonderful: We don't have to have great abilities – only availability! God doesn't call us to something that can't be done, for there's nothing that He can't do through us!

There's no limit to how God will work in our lives, when Jesus is in the midst. There's no telling what God will do through Riverlawn ... in our communities ... in our world – when Jesus is in the midst! [P]

I'll close with a quote from the late Billy Graham, speaking on our upper room passage, as Jesus appears, speaks peace, and dispels fear: *"The answer to our individual fears is found in a personal faith in the living, glorified Lord. The answer to shared fears is a shared faith in the living, glorified Lord. The answer to global fears is for the world to know the One who is alive forevermore. We do not worship a dead Christ. We worship a risen Christ, who has broken the power of sin and death and hell. Why then should we fear? Uncertainty breeds fear, and the world is an uncertain place. Focus, instead, on the steadfast Savior, who, ever lives and ever reigns."* ([Hope for Each Day](#))

We celebrate our Risen Savior this morning. We celebrate that Jesus is in our midst!