

Natalie W. Bell  
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 Second Sunday of Easter

**Then Jesus Showed Up  
 John 20:19-31**

*When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." 22 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 But Thomas (who was called the Twin<sup>[c]</sup>), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." 26 A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." 28 Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."*

*30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. 31 But these are written so that you may come to believe<sup>[d]</sup> that Jesus is the Messiah,<sup>[e]</sup> the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.*

I wonder, do you ***remember where you were 25 years ago today?***

April 19, 1995?

It's been all over the news lately because it's the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary—  
 Of the Oklahoma City bombing.

***Do you remember where you were?***

I do. I was in seminary in New Jersey, and a friend in our apartment building ran over and said, aren't you from Oklahoma City? Turn on the news.  
 And there it was.

A picture of the bombed building, and a rattled news anchor wondering whether this was terrorism, or a sign of other bombings to come.

I remember it so well because I just stopped my studies and studied the television. Soon, the news being broadcasted was *straight from OKC*—the OKC division being streamed through our usual New York City channel. Surreal, right?

Similarly, I was with my little kids at a friend's house when *9/11 happened*, and it was almost the reverse. I was in Tulsa, but soon the television was streaming straight from NYC.

I remember the *FEAR of the days after the bombing, and after 9/11*. And I remember just how much *changed* after those events. Before the bombing, you could easily enter a federal building. No more. Before 9/11 you could accompany someone to their airport gate as they took off. No more. Before 9/11 you could visit the White House, and even drive a car right in front of it. No more.

As I think about this global pandemic of COVID-19, I realize that *this crisis might CHANGE us* for a long time, if not forever. How long will we stay 6 feet apart, avoiding handshakes or hugs? How long will we wear cloth masks when going out in public? How long will we work from home, or not gather in restaurants, sporting events, or concerts?

### ***And the FEAR.***

The fear—do you remember the fear of that April bombing? Of 9/11? Do you remember what happened in the days and weeks afterward? Those events led to *new and ongoing fears*.

So I found it very powerful this week to think about the *fear of the disciples*, as they gathered in a locked home—away from those who might persecute them. I thought about *their fear for their own lives*. After all, they had seen Jesus arrested, beaten, crucified, and buried! An innocent man! Who was to say that *they wouldn't be next*? Why would they be spared, especially knowing that they had supported Jesus!

It ***MAKES SENSE*** that they would have been afraid.  
Just like it makes sense for us to ***have our own fears*** during this pandemic.

I wonder—***what are you feeling right now?***  
***What are your own fears and worries?***

What if, in many ways, ***we are like those early followers***,  
gathered in our own locked homes,  
full of fear of what might happen to us?

***So, what happens when those disciples gather in the locked room?***

Jesus. Jesus happens.

Jesus shows up!

***Jesus appears to them, in the flesh!***

He is not a dream, or an apparition, they are not having some kind of hallucination.  
This is Jesus—and he willingly shows them the scars in his hands and his side.  
It is Jesus—resurrected—in a new body—but his body—  
with the scars, the proof that he is the one crucified and risen!

I think many of us remember the ***stories of heroism and helping*** after the bombing. We probably all remember the ***famous picture of a firefighter*** holding a small child in his arms.

We remember the picture of the ***American flag being raised*** at Ground Zero,  
or pics of hundreds of photos posted near the twin towers,  
from families looking for their loved ones.

We remember stories of those who ***dug through the rubble*** to find survivors and those who had passed.

And we ***celebrated every little victory***, every story of people helping people.

After Jesus death and resurrection—

***Jesus' own followers had reason to celebrate—the ultimate reason.***

Because ***Jesus himself appeared*** to them.

He showed up, right in the midst of their fear and sorrow.

***HOPE showed up.***

I am constantly amazed by the people on the ***front lines of this pandemic***—  
the first responders, doctors and nurses who are helping those who are sick—  
often acting as not only a doctor or nurse, but also a pastor or priest.  
My sister who is an ER doctor in Harlem volunteered to work on Easter,

because she thought it might be healing and meaningful to have someone offering care and compassion on such a holy day.

After all, all the COVID patients are ALONE.

All alone in the ER, and throughout their time at the hospital, because no visitors are allowed.

And I think about all those *helpers*—and how they are the *epitome of hope*.

Hope in the midst of fear, and sorrow.

A hope that shows up.

To me, they are actually *the hands and feet of Christ*.

When people read this story from John 20,

they often *focus on Thomas*, even calling him ‘doubting Thomas’,

because he said that he wouldn’t believe in the resurrection until he touched Jesus’ scars!

But the truth is, Thomas does have belief,

he is the one who declares *My Lord, and My God!*

This year the story just seems to resonate for *ALL the people involved* in it, not just Thomas.

They are all afraid, and they all are likely doubting the accounts of his resurrection.

Thomas just gets singled out in the story because he is only there for the second appearance of the risen Christ.

Do you realize *what happens when Jesus does show up* in this story?

He does not just come to say—see, I told you I’d be resurrected! I really am alive.

He appears, and shows them his scars,

But it’s more than that, isn’t it?

He goes on to give them some *gifts*.

Much needed gifts, *in addition to the hope in the midst of their fear*.

First, he gives them **PEACE**. *“Peace be with you. He says.*

He gives His peace, the peace of Christ---that peace that goes beyond our human understanding, as Paul so eloquently describes in Philippians 4.

But Jesus does even more than giving them peace.

Next, he gives them a new **PURPOSE, a mission**.

*Jesus said to them again, As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”*

After all, his resurrection is not just proof of who he is,

it is also the beginning of his followers carrying out his message and mission into the whole world!

He announced the kingdom of God,

now it's time for all of his followers to share that good news!

So *Jesus sends them*, just as He himself was sent by his Father God.

***But how will this happen?***

Jesus doesn't stop with offering them His peace, or a new purpose.

He gives them the **POWER to live it out.**

He gives them the **gift of the Holy Spirit.**

***22 When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them,  
"Receive the Holy Spirit."***

This is similar to what happens in the Book of Acts, when the people receive the Holy Spirit and they are empowered to preach, each in different languages.

But this is also so personal.

***He breathes on them.***

***Breath is powerful*** in the Bible—God breathes life into Adam at his creation.

God breathes life into dry bones before the prophet Elijah.

The very word for Spirit, pneuma, means breath or wind.

When Jesus breathes on them,

He is giving an invisible power---HIS power.

***The gift of the Holy Spirit is the gift of God.***

Incredibly, this peace and mission and empowerment Is not all that Jesus gives them when he shows up behind the locked doors!

He also gives them **GRACE**, and the power to impart grace.

***23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."***

***Grace and Peace,***

***Power and Purpose.***

These are the gifts of Jesus, giving to scared and sorrowful disciples.

What if these are the ***very same gifts that are given to us—today?***

What if these are the gifts that Jesus brings to us,  
in our fear and sorrow?

I wonder—where have you seen Jesus’ *grace and peace* during this pandemic?  
Where have you seen His *power and purpose*?

Last week I was talking about David Kessler’s work  
on finding **MEANING** in grief—as a sixth stage of grief.  
As I read and listen even more to his work,  
I realize that meaning, and goodness, really can be found even in the midst of the  
kind of grief we are all experiencing right now!

*We are all grieving*—in so many different ways.  
We are grieving the loss of personal connection, and touch, and shared community.  
We are grieving the loss of our usual routines, and schedules, and the separation of  
home, work, and school.

*But, we are people of HOPE.*

We are people who believe in the power of Hope in the midst of fear.  
Because it is our Savior Jesus who brought the *ultimate Hope* in the midst of  
fear—  
when he was raised from death after the crucifixion,  
and when he appeared resurrected to his scared followers!

*We all have reason to grieve,*  
*but we also have reason to hope!*  
And we have these gifts of Jesus—of **Grace, Peace, Power and purpose.**

*Where are you finding these gifts today—*  
as you shelter in place at home,  
as you stay away from others and in your home?

Are you finding new and different types of **family time**?  
I have heard of families talking about the power of shared meals during this time  
when we are not always eating out or separately.  
If you live alone, are you finding new meaningful conversations on the **phone**?  
What about via Zoom, or email, or even the old standby—regular postal **mail**.  
I hear that handwritten letters are making a comeback, which I love!

Are you **walking** around outside?  
Are you seeing more of your **neighbors** as you walk outdoors?  
Are you talking to people you never talked to before?

What about **books** you've been wanting to read, and now you are finally starting?  
What about hobbies, or **arts and crafts**---

I've seen and heard stories of people who are now taking up painting, gardening, home improvement projects....

and others who are starting to learn new things, like sewing, knitting or crochet. I know that I have so enjoyed taking some time to not only sew masks for people, but also work on quilting projects!

Are any of these activities ***sources of Christ's GRACE AND PEACE*** for you?  
For me, sewing and walking outside bring that for me.

And what about ***POWER and PURPOSE***?  
How are you finding new power and purpose in this pandemic?

I know that even more of you are checking on and stocking the Owasso Community Resources blessing box for those who are struggling to find food and paper goods.  
Others are reaching out in new and personal ways.

Where is ***God's POWER*** evident in your life right now?

Where is ***God's PURPOSE*** for you in this pandemic?

The question is not if we have God's grace and peace, power and purpose,  
But ***HOW AND WHERE*** we have received these things,  
And how we can ***SHARE THEM with others***.

For that is the ultimate goal, right?  
To ***RECEIVE*** these gifts of God,  
and then to ***SHARE*** them with those around us!

Every time people encounter God in the Bible, or Jesus, or the risen Lord—  
there is a ***purpose*** to that encounter,  
and part of that purpose is to share with other people.

When Mary Magdalene sees the risen Lord,  
she is told to ***go and tell the good news***,  
and that's exactly what she does.

Friends, hear the *Good News of the Gospel* today!  
When we are in the grips of fear and sorrow---Jesus comes to us.  
And he does more than show up in our lives---  
He brings **gifts** to us.  
Gifts of **Grace and Peace, Power and Purpose**.  
May we all look for these gifts and share them!  
And for these gifts, all God's people say, Amen.