

Sermon 24.04.07

Kate Heinzl, pastor

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." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." 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 retain the sins of any, they are retained."

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 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."

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." 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." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 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."

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

1 John 1: 1-4 (Inclusive Bible translation)

That which was from the beginning,
which we have heard, and seen with our eyes,
and have looked at and touched with our hands:
the Word, who is Life -
this is the subject of our letter.

That life came to be; we saw it and bear witness to it.
We proclaim to you the eternal life
which was with Abba God and was manifested to us.
What we have seen and heard we declare to you,
so that you may be one with us -

as we are one with Abba God
and with the Only Begotten, Jesus Christ.
We write this to fulfill our joy.

Don't Hesitate by Mary Oliver

If you suddenly and unexpectedly feel joy,
don't hesitate. Give in to it. There are plenty
of lives and whole towns destroyed or about
to be. We are not wise, and not very often
kind. And much can never be redeemed.
Still, life has some possibility left. Perhaps this
is its way of fighting back, that sometimes
something happens better than all the riches
or power in the world. It could be anything,
but very likely you notice it in the instant
when love begins. Anyway, that's often the case.
Anyway, whatever it is, don't be afraid
of its plenty. Joy is not made to be a crumb.

<https://ehrmanblog.org/the-history-behind-johns-gospel/> Excellent history on John's community
being expelled from the temple/community.

Tikkun Olam - repair the world....

<https://soundcloud.com/onbeing/rachel-naomi-remen-the-story-of-tikkun-olam?in=8cako/sets/podcast>
s Rachel Naomi Remen tells the story of TO to Krista Tippett

<https://www.brandeis.edu/jewish-experience/history-culture/2023/may/tikkun-olam-history.html>

Isaac Luria¹, the renowned sixteenth century Kabbalist, used the phrase “tikkun olam,” usually translated as repairing the world, to encapsulate the true role of humanity in the ongoing evolution and spiritualization of the cosmos. Luria taught that God created the world by forming vessels of light to hold the Divine Light. But as God poured the Light into the vessels, they catastrophically shattered, tumbling down toward the realm of matter. Thus, our world consists of countless shards of the

¹ <http://www.innerfrontier.org/Practices/TikkunOlam.htm>

original vessels entrapping sparks of the Divine Light. Humanity's great task involves helping God by freeing and reuniting the scattered Light, raising the sparks back to Divinity and restoring the broken world.

We meet similar concepts in other religions. Christ promised to return with the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven and exhorted people to prepare through [love](#), [wakefulness](#), and [charity](#). In Buddhism, the Bodhisattva vows to forgo final liberation until all beings have been freed from suffering. The Gnostics held that a spark of Divinity resides entrapped within the [soul](#) of humans.

Tikkun olam encompasses both the outer and the inner, both service to society by helping those in need and service to the Divine by liberating the spark within.

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/584893> Bruggemann

<https://inheritmag.com/articles/tikkun-olam-repairing-the-world>

1 pound of wheat has about 7000 grains
SCASD has nearly 7000 students

Carl Keener writings on Anabaptism: "The loaf represents the many grains of wheat required to make the loaf. Take, eat, this is my body."

We can't touch the wounds in his side, or see the scars on his hands. We can share bread together. Make it together. Feed one another.

from scripture:

Peace be with you.
showed hands and side and they rejoiced.

As the father has sent me, so I send you. Receive the holy spirit - the power to forgive was given to them.

We don't see, but we've come to believe. Jesus is the Messiah - and brings life.

from Working preacher, Second Sunday of Easter, April 7 2024

Jesus comes for Thomas - what T needs is what everyone else has already got - Mary said 'I have seen the Lord', the disciples said 'we have seen the Lord'. What T needs is not evidence, or proof, he just wants to say "I have seen the Lord too". This is what Jesus gives him. J came, giving T what he needed. He made it particular; truly knowing what was needed for T to recognize him. J. finds us, gives us what we need to say "I have seen the Lord" -

might we be the hands and feet - the ones who repair the world? Tikkun Olam?

John 20:19-23

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." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." 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 retain the sins of any, they are retained."

John's gospel was written to a community that was undergoing a painful separation from the Jewish society to which its members belonged. They were being disciplined; punished for preaching that Jesus is the Messiah.

"The Jews" are the synagogue authorities.

John 20:31 - aim of the gospel - to encourage its readers to believe that Jesus is the Messiah - in the historical context of when it was written, it was to inspire members of the community to maintain their belief during a troubled time rather than to convert outsiders.²

² Introductory notes to John's Gospel found in *The HarperCollins Study Bible, NRSV*. 2006. HarperOne Publishers.

Children's time:

What's something that you eat everyday? Around the world, bread is one of those things. Tortillas, pita bread, for sandwiches...

Grandma's table - always had one thing. Bread.

Communion today. Why do we celebrate communion? To remember. What do we use? Bread/grape juice.

What's most bread made from? Wheat.

How many grains of wheat are in a pound? Quarter pound **of wheat berries mills one cup of flour**. 1 cup flour has about 1750 grains of wheat. 9 cups of flour here - how many grains of wheat?

Every grain matters. One loaf takes many grains. Today's communion bread - around 3000 grains.

"Take, eat, this is my body." What does that mean? That we are to carry on the work of Jesus in the world.

In our scripture this morning Jesus said "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

He sent them out to do his work - loving God by loving the world.

Every grain matters. Every person matters. We all have work to do. One reason we take communion is to remember this.

HELP STARTING DOUGH -

Warm water, yeast in measuring cup.

mix flour, salt, oil in big bowl, more water. Stir.

Let sit - end with prayer

During Sunday school we're going to take this dough, shape it, and bake it. Right after church you can go into the basement to make a roll.

Sermon:

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." Then he showed them his hands and his side, and the disciples rejoiced. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ..."

No waiting 50 days for the Spirit to be given to them, no Pentecost - in John's gospel it happens on Easter evening, in the private setting of a locked room. So different from the author of Luke and Act's account of the Spirit descending like tongues of fire.

In John's gospel:

When it was evening on that day...

What a day. In John's gospel Mary found the stone rolled away - Peter and another disciple saw the mostly empty tomb - finding the linen wrappings, and believing. Believing what, it's not quite clear. They went home. Mary stayed by the tomb, grieving - met the Gardner-slash-Jesus, and returned to them saying "I have seen the Lord!".

That was early in the day. Now it's evening. The light fading. The doors locked out of fear.

Jesus stood among them.

Stood among them. Not in front of them, not going ahead of them. Here he is, among them. Meeting them in their place of fear. A locked room.

"Peace be with you."

After looking, probing, making sure it was really him, they rejoiced. What sweet relief!

I want to pause here for a moment and feel the disciples' relief, and joy.

I read that line and my heart aches. I can only imagine the rejoicing, the tense muscles relaxing, a sense of wonder growing in them. I can only imagine...

And almost immediately -

Jesus says again: "Peace be with you" and he goes on - "As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

No time for nostalgia. No time to process what happened and what's happening. Jesus prepares them to carry on - to take up his work in new ways.

He breathes on them. Giving them the Holy Spirit. Receive it, take it in, he tells them.

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

Those lines can make me cringe. They hold so much power. So much potential abuse.

To give to humans, those frail, at times clueless disciples, the power to forgive or not forgive...what's going on here? Jesus knows how these sitting huddled in fear have faltered.

I want to skip over that part. There are so many stories of clergy abuse, of scripture being twisted in ways that are not life giving; that do not promote forgiveness and grace.

So many ways that scriptures like these have been used in abusive ways that I'm so tempted to jump right over them and move onto Thomas.

But today I want to spend time here, in this first part of the passage, and save Thomas for another time.

And I recognize that forgiveness is so complicated. It doesn't come easily - nor fast. In some cases, offering forgiveness may not be wise. I want to name that, hold the complexity of forgiveness, and dig in at least a little.

*Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you."
...and then he breathed on them, saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."*

The word translated here as forgive *aphiémi*³ (af-ee'-ay-mee) means to forgive - like a debt, this same Greek word is used in the Lord's prayer. It's got a broader meaning as well. It also is translated - to let go, to release, to allow.

"If you let go of the sins of any, they are released. If you retain the sins of any, they are retained"

Forgiving here is about letting go; releasing.

Retained (if you retain the sins of any) -another word with a lot of depth. *kratéō*⁴ (krat-eh'-o). The broader meaning of that word is to take hold of; to seize; to hold fast.

³ <https://biblehub.com/greek/863.htm>

⁴ <https://biblehub.com/greek/2902.htm>

If you let go of the faults of any, they are released. If you hold onto the failures of others, they are seized, held onto tightly.

We need to remember that this gospel - just like all the books, letters, gospels found in the bible - this gospel was written to a particular people at a particular time. John's community were those suffering from being banished from their synagogues. They were part of the Jewish community, being told they no longer belonged. Shunned.

Might the resurrected Jesus be telling those first listeners what was needed for them to not be bitter? Or resentful? There's a message here, for them, on how to carry on the work of Jesus, spreading the Good News of love and redemption?

Was their first task to forgive - to not seize up; not being consumed by their own anger and fear and resentment, but to release and forgive?

That in order to go forth, to be sent out to share the love of Christ, they first had to work on themselves?

Peter, John, Andrew, the disciples in the room that night also had some forgiving to do. Forgiving themselves, forgiving one another, forgiving the Romans, forgiving the temple authorities, their Jewish brothers.

In order for anyone to do the work of love, does it start with grace, mercy and forgiveness?

Must we start by forgiving? And is part of that creating space for all to find their way here, to the table?

So much forgiving to do - our own little misunderstandings; small missteps... all the way up to tragedies that are happening around the world.

How have I harmed you? Sinned against the ones I love - my community? How has relationship been broken?

We all have work to do - to not seize up, but to release, to open, to be made into something new. It's hard work. It requires being changed, like the grains of wheat.

Each little grain of wheat adds to the loaf.

And how that bread dough is made, matters. Needs just the right amount of flour and the right kind of flour... needs to be kneaded enough - I've made lots of bread - wrong flour; yeast that was too old - didn't rise; hard as a board...

In communion we hear the words of Jesus - take, eat, this is my body.

We are fed so that we can go forth - to carry on the work of love.

The grains of wheat are ground into flour. Crushed, made into something new.

And then kneaded. The process of kneading is to stretch the gluten. Gluten is made up of two proteins that when mixed with water combine and form gluten. The more the dough is mixed, the more gluten is developed.

The more it's kneaded, the looser, and stronger the gluten strands become. Kneading stretches it more and more so it has the capacity to not break.

Grain crushed so that it can be used for nourishment; kneading, stretching the dough so that it becomes strong, what metaphors for our lives.

And then this lump of dough is again made new - in the fires of the oven. Made into sustenance.

We can't touch the wounds in his side, or see the scars on his hands. We can share bread together. Make it together. Feed one another. be bread

Be nourished together so we can go out and love.

And we start by naming our own failures - our places of sin, of falling short.

Confession (VT 893)

For failing to love others as you have loved us...

God of grace, **forgive us.**

For wasting your gifts and hoarding our goods...

God of grace, **forgive us.**

For plundering the earth and abusing the planet...

God of grace, **forgive us.**

For fearing those who are strange to us and ignoring those in need...

God of grace, **forgive us.**

For losing heart and abandoning hope...

God of grace, **forgive us.**

For all the ways we turn from you...

God of grace, **forgive us.**

SILENCE

We offer our prayers in the name of the One who saves,
Jesus the Christ. **Amen.**

Prayer to end communion:

(STS 166)

You meet us in our hungering
with manna not of our making,
and in our thirsting you surprise us with unexpected wine.
You are the source of our desiring and the end
of all our longing.
O Giver of the feast, and ever-present Guest,
blessed be.
Amen.

resources:

<https://www.ifst.org/lovefoodlovescience/resources/protein-gluten-formation#:~:text=Kneading%20causes%20the%20gluten%20strands,it%20easier%20to%20roll%20out.>