

The Passing of Christ's Peace: John 20:19-25

Norwalk Christian Church, May 3, 2020, Livestream, Eastertide 4, Year A

It's been a difficult week for pastors...for churches.

Monday, our Governor said we could reopen if we wish. Then Tuesday, I sat in on a zoom meeting with pastors from around Central Iowa and an infectious disease specialist from Fort Dodge, who told us just how bad of an idea that was right now. We've been wrestling with it since.

If you re-open right now, while things are still so unknown and numbers increasing at their greatest rates yet, she said, it'd be too much, trying to limit all the possible ways we could unintentionally harm one another.

When you start thinking of that list: Marti and I get to preach and Kim plays the organ in silence. The three of us might like the attention...but is that church?

It's been hard having this dropped back on our laps, not knowing what is actually safe, what is right, when is the right time. We so want to be with you, in person. But we also want to be safe—all of us safe—making room for all, so that all can truly be welcome.

Your board will talk more about it tomorrow, and begin making plans for when it is safe. But let me tell you--it can't come soon enough!

All this distancing. This worry and fear. It's getting to me. While the alternative doesn't yet feel safe for us all, this--I'm getting a little tired of this.

Here we are, online, with even more silence. Less sharing. More distance. We long to be together.

Yet, we've learned something these last 8 Sundays, haven't we. Something we didn't quite expect. This--this, too, is church.

It's been three weeks since Easter, but in the Gospel this morning, it's still Easter, only a verse after where we stopped reading on Easter Sunday. A bit appropriate, I guess, for there have been days lately that have felt like three weeks long.

It's still Easter, church. And the disciples have just received the good news. "Christ is risen!", Mary Magdalene preached to them. And where are they?

Locked in a room out of fear. Sound familiar?

By all accounts, the disciples spent 50 days after Easter, quarantined from a world that wanted to snuff out the Jesus movement for good. Isolated, locked in rooms or alone on the shoreline, social distancing from the world they knew, a world now changed forever.

Locked away for 50 days after Easter.

Pentecost is our next big Christian Holiday. May 31st. Pente means 50; 50 days after Easter. It took that period of fear and isolation for the disciples to emerge, ready to figure out what it means to follow Jesus in their new world. It took 50 days for them to be ready to move from hearing the good news that Christ had risen, to proclaiming it themselves.

See, resurrection--the transition from an old life to a new one--is rarely in a rush.

All birth takes time. In a womb, growing, transforming, learning. Eventually the old begins to pass away, and we can begin to behold the new.

We're in a womb now. Maybe a little tired of our womb mates. But can you imagine what new thing will be birthed after our gestation period is over, when it's finally safe to emerge?

Things will look different. Feel different. Some traditions we've known and loved for our 150 years will have to be jettisoned for love and safety of neighbors.

And this breathing on them that Jesus does in our text--yeah, it might be awhile before we do that--even speak of it--without cringing.

But new traditions *will* emerge. New ways of being church. New ways of doing the same old things Christians have been doing for millenia.

Our perspective here in Norwalk is only 150 years old. But church has been doing church for some time now. From first meeting in synagogues, to by rivers and trees, to homes and then catacombs, to big, beautiful buildings. From reciting the psalms, to performing symphonic masterpieces. From passing stories on orally, to a Bible, printed and bound, available to all in their own language.

Across coasts and borders, from a small, local movement, to a global church. The church has always been changing. Adapting. Growing.

And, maybe this metaphor is a bit too soon, but our faith, it's like a pathogen. Christianity is a pandemic that has adapted and spread, and cannot be snuffed out. And, Disciples, there is no vaccine.

It began in that locked room. They were scared. They heard the news, but they locked the door. They hid from the truth.

But Truth came in anyway. It passed right through the walls. It breathed on them, and they caught it. They caught the Spirit.

From there, it grew and grew, until the Spirit burst forth, spreading from that room to our rooms today. Jesus, alive, passing through our locked doors and walls, entering our homes. No matter who we are, or where we are, or how tightly we are locked away--God's Spirit infects us, changes us, fills us up with God's peace, a peace that we've caught to pass to the world.

When we emerge from these wombs we are in--and we will emerge--new life always emerges. What will we be when we emerge? Things, well, they'll look different. It will feel different. There will be a period of readjustment. But we *will* be church again.

Well, not again. See, we've never stopped being church. We can't stop being church. It's who we are. Jesus' spirit--merged with our DNA. We will always be church.

And there may be some of us, like Thomas, who struggle to see it and believe it. That's okay. I'll be honest--I'm struggling to see it and believe it, even now as I speak it to you.

But it's no less real. Christ is risen. Christ spirit is here, among us, especially as we are a part.

Because no door, no wall, no screen, no distance--no virus--can keep Jesus' peace from spreading.

And when we can finally gather in person together again--and may it be soon--we will gather more full of Christ's peace than we've ever been before, ready to spread Christ's good news, as we continue the work of Disciples.

For church, we are Disciples of Christ. And even now, we are a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world.

Beautiful Disciples, may the peace of Christ be with you, fill you up--right there where you sit right now. May you feel Christ's breath on you, as the wind blows, as the phone rings with a call from a friend, as a neighbor waves, or the birds chirp--for this distance cannot hold Christ's peace back.

Breath deeply, and fill your lungs with Christ's Spirit. And when the time is right, may Christ's Spirit of peace send us out to change the world. Amen.