

ALL OF THE ABOVE THROUGH THE GOD OF LOVE

"Sent with the Peace of Christ"

January 3, 2021

Overarching theme: In 2021, FUMC will be SENT with the peace of Christ!

Instructions:

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. *The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.*

Core Point:

On Easter evening, the Risen Christ appears to his gathered disciples for the first time since Good Friday and speaks these words: "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you." Just as Jesus sent his disciples into a divided, conflicted 1st Century with his peace, so he sends us into a divided, conflicted 2021 with his peace.

John:

The Gospel of John was probably the last of the four Gospels written. The "John" who is named as author in the title is not the same one who is introduced in John 1:6, that is, John the Baptist. Nor is a "John" ever identified within the text as the Gospel's author. Instead, the author is said to be "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 21:20), an anonymous follower of Jesus who makes brief appearances at the Last Supper (John 13:23); the crucifixion (John 19:26-27); the empty tomb (John 29:2-5, 8); and at the Sea of Galilee after Jesus' resurrection (John 21:7). Tradition identifies this disciple as John, son of Zebedee (Mark 1:19), but his actual identity remains unknown.

Like the other three Gospels, John is written "so that you will believe that Jesus is the Christ, God's Son" (John 20:31). But at the heart of it is something more. Jesus' intent for his disciples is that "you will know that I am in my Father, you are in me and I am in you" (John 14:20). This, perhaps, is why John is the favorite Gospel of so many Christian believers. More than any other it draws its readers into the ancient story, assuring all who believe that they are "God's children, born not from blood nor from human desire or passion, but born from God" (John 1:12-13). Its legacy is nothing less than a new birth, a promise of eternal life that begins not at death, not even at the coming of God's kingdom, but here and now.

-Common English Study Bible, NT pp 167-168

Reflect on these Scriptures:

John 20:19-28 NRSV

¹⁹ 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^[c]), 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!"

Commentary:

Jesus' repeated greeting (v. 21a) is not simply reduplicative. The disciples can receive Jesus' words as his gift of peace and not simply as a greeting only after they recognize that the person who speaks to them is "the Lord" (v. 20). Jesus' words in v. 21b are a direct echo of his prayer at 17:18. The syntax of both verses clearly positions the Father's sending of Jesus (e.g., 3:17; 4:34; 5:36, 10:36; 14:24; 17:3, 8) as an analogue for Jesus' sending of the community. Jesus thus commissions the faith community to continue the work God sent him to do.

Jesus' breathing on the disciples (v. 22) is explicitly linked with his words in v. 21 ("When he had said this..."), so that the gift of the Spirit is presented as that which empowers the community to continue Jesus' work. The Spirit was promised for the time after Jesus' glorification (7:37-39), and at v. 22 that moment has arrived. The verb "to breathe" occurs only here in the NT, and its usage clearly evokes the description of God's breathing the breath of life into the first human in Gen 2:7. It also recalls the description of the breath of life in Ezek 37:9 (see also the description of God in Wis 15:11: "and breathed a living spirit into them" (NRSV). Jesus' breathing the Holy spirit on his disciples thus is described as a new, second creation. The image of new life provides an important link with Jesus' announcement in 20:17. Those who believe in Jesus receive new life as children of God (cf. 3:3-10), and the Holy Spirit is the breath that sustains that new life.
– adapted from the *New Interpreter's Bible Commentary, Vol IX p. 846*

This week – “2021 - Sent with the Peace of Christ!”

In this passage, 10 of the 11 remaining disciples are in LOCKDOWN MODE. They are in a locked Room on Easter Evening, fearing that the same authorities that crucified Jesus might be coming for them next. They are also “locked down” in grief and guilt, as their Thursday night courage vanished early Friday morning. Each of them had deserted Jesus in his time of trial and Peter thrice denied even knowing him!

But for Jesus their lockdown is in no way insurmountable. The Risen Christ breaks through all barriers and twice offers his incredulous 10 gathered disciples these words – **Peace be with you.** In four words he dispelled their fear, grief and guilt and offered them a peace mission to the world: *“As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”*

Thomas, the 11th disciple, was definitely late to the resurrection party but Jesus a week later brings him up to speed. His declaration of faith - *“My Lord and my God”* – not only becomes the exclamation point of the Gospel of John, but his example of being sent with the gospel to India (according to reliable church tradition) is instructive for all who may have been late to the party of faithful discipleship, so to speak. We have a 2021 opportunity (even if we are still in a pandemic lockdown of sorts) to be John 20:21 disciples today – sent with the peace of Christ into a divided, conflicted world desperately in need of his enduring peace.

Questions to Ponder for accountability in the group:

As you think about this passage, how can you respond to this Scripture?

1. If you had been with the disciples in lockdown on that first Easter evening, how would you have responded if Jesus showed up?
2. Why do you think Jesus’ first words to them were, *“Peace be with you”*? Why do you think he repeated these words?
3. The biblical understanding of peace is far more than a truce from hostilities. It carries with it the enduring presence of Jesus and a sense of forgiveness, wholeness, completeness, lacking nothing. Given that, if you were in that room, how would you have felt after Jesus offered this gift of peace?
4. Thomas was missing on Easter evening. When he rejoined the others, he famously expressed his doubts. His doubts melted away after encountering the Risen Christ for himself the next Sunday. In your opinion, what does Thomas’ absenteeism reveal about him? How about his doubts? What does Jesus’ encounter with Thomas the next Sunday say about Jesus?

5. Jesus gave his disciples a mission – John 20:21 – to be sent into the world (beyond their locked doors) to offer the gift of peace. They obeyed (Thomas even went to India!). How might Jesus be sending you this year, given the ongoing limitations of the pandemic? Brainstorm ways that you or your LIFE group can offer the peace of Christ at this time.

Activity for the life of a disciple:

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMC.
2. Ponder and pray on this Scripture this week: John 20:21 NRSV
²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you."
3. This week, try out one of the ideas that you brainstormed in #5 above.