

## Beholding the One Who Brings Peace | John 20:19-23 | 10.06.19 | Kevin P. Larson

I didn't get the opportunity to go, but Roots and Blues was last weekend, and Jason Isbell was back in town. The singer-songwriter has this tune called "Elephant" that he calls his best work. A friend is dying of cancer. How do they deal with it? Medicate themselves with alcohol and dope. And "try to ignore the elephant somehow." That's the refrain that repeats: "We just try to ignore the elephant somehow."

Isn't this how we tend to deal with suffering today? With the sin all around us? With cancer. Divorce. With shootings on what seems like every corner. With the government about to blow apart at its seams. Bury our heads in the sand. Turn up the music. Rifle through the medicine cabinet. Ignore the elephant.

We've been walking slowly through the gospel of John here in Karis Church. We're nearing the end. We're here at the climax. The crescendo. To the surprise of his followers, their Lord Jesus, the greatest human they've ever met, is nailed to a cross. And with it, their hopes. He's executed like - and with - the worst of criminals. And his disciples don't know what to do.

But the story isn't over. Last week, Michael preached from **chapter 20, verses 11 through 18**. Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb to see her Lord's dead body. And she's the first to learn that Jesus is alive. In a society that denigrated women, Jesus highly esteemed them - enough to appear to her first. As we'll see today, Jesus came to bring a new kingdom, to turn upside-down the values of the world. And John includes that detail in a world that didn't accept or respect the testimony of women. He wouldn't have done it, of course, if it all hadn't been true.

Well, what Mary learns - and what the others will see with us today - is that there's hope. We don't have to ignore the perils and ills of this world. There is a way to deal with them, to face it all head-on. Christ is risen!

### **Christ Offers Us Peace**

Now put another point on the ladies' scoreboard here. Because Mary's sticking her head in the tomb, and the boys are hiding under the table. Right? The twelve - no, now the 11 - no, we'll see next week it's really 10 - they're behind locked doors, we learn in **verse 19**. Now they're no doubt devastated. But we learn here they're also terrified. The passage says they're quaking in "**fear of the Jews.**"

Now that makes sense, right? The leaders had just killed their rabbi. It would make sense that they could be next. But there's another reason why I think we can relate. They're not just acting like chickens. But donkeys, too. Scholars have long talked about the "dullness of the disciples." Jesus had told them multiple times that He would die. And after that, He would rise again. But they just aren't getting it. Still. And that should comfort us when we are slow to understand and believe and obey. Jesus doesn't give up on them. He comes and finds them in that home. Praise the Lord that He also pursues us. The disciples here begin to grasp things when he walks into the room.

And talk about an entrance! The doors are locked. And there He is. In their midst. There's no mention of Him entering through the door. Now this has understandably caused some confusion. Some have thought, "Well, if Jesus is a spirit, then he doesn't need a door." But Jesus isn't just spirit. He has a body. We'll see that clearly in the weeks ahead.

Others have said, "It's a resurrected, perfect body. Maybe we won't need doors in the new world." Maybe. But I just take it as a miracle - pure and simple. He burst out of the tomb. Who needs a door?

Regardless, He stands there in front of them. And now maybe they're *really* afraid. This is the first of several appearances He makes on His post-resurrection tour. How do we know Jesus really rose? People saw Him. And those appearances were recorded in writings like John's gospel that anyone could have risen up to dispute. But we have no record of that. Because He really rose.

Well, what do we hear Jesus say to them there? He greets them with these words, in **verse 19, "Peace be with you."** Now to most, this would have come across as a pretty standard greeting in that day. Basically, "Shalom, y'all!" But this is no ordinary man. And He repeats the words - there in **verse 21**. Throw in what Jesus shows them. And it's clear these words carry deep meaning. **Here's the first point I want you to see this morning: Christ offers to us peace.**

I mentioned the word *shalom*. That's the Hebrew word for peace. But we tend to just think of it as a calm, easy feeling. But it's far more rich of a word in that culture. Shalom means wholeness. It means wellbeing. Welfare. Flourishing in every aspect of life. It's everything messed up by the fall made right. When Jesus shows up, resurrected from the dead, and says, "**Peace be with you,**" He's saying, "Peace is coming. Peace has come. It's yours." Everything wrong and sad will be made right. In me.

So often, we just talk about life, about the gospel in this way: God - Man - Christ - Response. And hear me: that's true. And we have to say those things. But that just casts the message of Christianity in individualistic terms. Get right with God. Through Jesus. Find peace, wholeness in Him alone. And that's right and good. But the Bible conceives of salvation as not less than that, but far much bigger than that. In cosmic scope. Read with me these words from Paul in **Colossians 1**.

**Col. 1:19** For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,

**Col. 1:20** and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven...

He's gonna make everything right. Order out of this chaos again. All things in harmony once again. Here's a complementary way we need to think about the gospel. Creation - Fall - Redemption - Restoration. It's not just you and me, if we're believers, who will be restored. God and man. Men and women with each other. And us with the creation. It'll all be restored. All suffering, sin, death, will come to an end. It'll be swallowed up by shalom.

Now Jesus says these words, "**Peace be with you.**" But He also does something, doesn't He? **Verse 20:** He shows "**them his hands and his side.**" Why? He's showing them how this peace comes about. His hands nailed to the cross. His side pierced by those soldiers. He comes to bring peace. That shalom is accomplished by His cross. Full, total redemption by His blood.

I grew up in a family that was afraid of storms. Specifically, my mom was petrified of them. We grew up over near the Kansas border, in an area called tornado alley. She took all sorts of over-the-top measures to keep us safe during tornado warnings. But say you're scared, too. Maybe you can even relate. You're anxious. You're shaking.

All you want is peace, for your fear to go away, for you to feel safe again. How's the only way that's going to happen? The storm has to pass through. Then you can calm back down.

We tend to think of peace just in subjective terms. How we feel. Our hearts. Do I feel peaceful or not? And that's important. But what we often forget is that there's an objective component, also. The storm. The problem causing our lack of peace. In wartime, people are fearful, anxious. But when the peace treaty is signed, people can exhale again.

There's this objective reality we have to recognize and deal with. Sin has separated us from God. From others. Even from His creation. We're at odds. And we need to be reconciled. We can't feel peaceful in wartime, or we're living in denial. The problem has to be dealt with. And that's what Jesus did on the cross.

Because God's holy, and we're not, He's righteously angry at us because of our sin. Kinda like when we see something in the news that's not right. We get mad. We image the Lord when we feel that way. Right? Except we're not perfect. Hear me: God is wrathful, or He's not worthy of worship. We're rebels. And we don't deserve His love. But on the cross, Jesus absorbs that wrath. He dies in our place. And the war is ended.

You may have noticed, we didn't read the last part of **Colossians 1:20**. Did we?

**Col. 1:19** For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,

**Col. 1:20** and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross

How does this shalom come about? Through His substitutionary death. Then, we can have that peaceful, easy feeling - at least in part on this earth. Then, we can be reconciled, also with others. That's what His cross does.

I posted an article on Facebook about how we should think about the big verdict in Dallas, and especially that embrace of the victim's brother with the convicted killer. A friend posted another article in response. The author reminds us we can't let one man's hug of a convicted murderer make us forget about his brother who took two to the chest. But in the process, she takes a shot at how Christians have historically preached the hope of the cross. She casts that as a problem. But I see it - and Christians have always seen it - as the solution! If Jesus paid for our sins - if He took the place, the punishment of those who believe. And we now are at peace with God. And if He'll one day punish those who don't - those who haven't repented, who've perpetuated injustice and violence - then WE DON'T HAVE TO. Vengeance will come. But vengeance is the Lord's! And that truth can make the man who just lost His brother give a hug. But more on that in a bit.

The peace of Christ changes everything. We don't just live in a world that's in denial - about sin, suffering, and death. We're pretty cynical about things today. And I get it. Our country's pretty messed up right now. And here comes the election cycle again. But most of the world has it far worse than we do. And so has been the experience of most people throughout history. And Jesus is standing there, telling people stuck under the rule of an oppressive, Roman Empire, "**Peace be with you.**"

Here's what we need. Preaching. And I'm talking about far more than what I'm doing right now. We have to preach this truth to our hearts. And to each other. To push against that cynicism that's all around us.

We're dull, too. We're unstable. And though our faith may be small, we need to remind each other of our big God. As I've said a hundred times up here, the world - and all its trials - it's either gonna make us harder or softer. And the world is telling us - especially on social media - to toughen up, to discount hope. And it is also tempting us to deaden ourselves and distract ourselves in entertainment, so that we don't wrestle with it all.

Don't take the bait. You may be in great pain. You may be experiencing deep sadness. See His hands, His side. He offers us peace, right here, right now. And He offers us peace in the future - a new world without pain and tears. Total shalom.

He died to bring this to us, Karis. Let's not - as we grow older - get caught up in the pleasures of this world. Let's not get pulled down by the trials of this life. Let's hear Him say, "**Peace be with you.**" We need these reminders from His Word, from each other. May the peace of Christ be with us, Karis.

### **Jesus Sends Us With Peace**

Well, the disciples appear to be getting softer here. They move from devastation to jubilation. Their Lord walks in. "**Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.**" That's how **verse 20** ends. An understatement, maybe? Christ's resurrection. The hope of shalom. That should fill us with gladness. And it should send us into the streets with that joy.

But before I get there, I want you to think about something else. A few minutes ago, they're under the table. Now their joy is trending upward. But what happens further down the road? Specifically, at the end? They suffer for their faith. They die. Almost all of them.

How do you explain the boldness of the disciples? How do you account for their transformation? I'll tell you how you can. He really rose from the dead. And appeared to them here. And that changed everything.

What does Jesus say to His disciples next? Well, "***Peace be with you.***" He wants them - and us - to hear this. But then He gives this calling. One we've talked about for years here at Karis. **Verse 20: "As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."** They're probably thinking, "Now what's the plan?" Jesus says, "Uh, you're the plan." **That's the second point I want you to see this morning: Jesus sends us with peace.**

Don't forget how the book begins. We were in **chapter one** forever ago. Jesus is there at the beginning with the Father, creating everything. But then the fall happens. The world gets worse and worse. And then God intervenes. He works to redeem everything. He sends His Son. Listen to **chapter 1, verse 14: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."** The word - that's Jesus - puts on our skin and moves into our hood. The Father sends the Son.

That's what theologians have long referred to as the incarnation. You've heard the word carnage - flesh getting torn up. Carnivore - flesh or meat eating animals. Jesus put on meat, put on flesh. And came to redeem. He came serving and healing and listening and preaching. Most of all, He came to die. And Jesus tells His disciples, and says to us, "***As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.***"

To live in all those ways, to do all of those things. We're not Jesus. We won't do it perfectly. We don't die for anyone's sins. But He asks us to pour out our lives.

The Father was the original missionary, walking through the garden, pursuing Adam and Eve when they strayed. He sends His Son who goes looking for His disciples, bursting into this room here. Jesus sends us as the Father sent Him. He sends us, also proclaiming, to those around us, "**Peace be with you.**"

Now we do go out, calling people to believe. In who Jesus is. In the peace He gives. To embrace His cross - again so this problem can be dealt with. And so our hearts will be flooded with His peace. That's what He sends us to do. That confusing last verse, **verse 23**, says this: "**If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.**" It's not like you or me or us as a church are the ones forgiving people. Only God can. The ESV Study Bible, a truly fantastic resource, explains it this way:

"The idea is not that individual Christians or churches have authority on their own to forgive or not forgive people, but rather that as the church proclaims the gospel message of forgiveness of sins in the power of the Holy Spirit (see v. 22), it proclaims that those who believe in Jesus have their sins forgiven, and that those who do not believe in him do not have their sins forgiven—which simply reflects what God in heaven has already done (cf. note on Matt. 16:19)." (ESV Study Bible)

He sends us out, proclaiming the gospel, calling those around us to faith. That's what Jesus did. And what He asks us to do. But we can't forget about all He came to accomplish.

Here's what is so easy for us to do today, in the American church. And it results from not having a full, rich gospel. We focus on just the spiritual and forget the physical. Jesus rose from the dead - with a body. He'll one day restore His creation - a material creation. And when He was on earth, Christ cared for the whole person. And so should we. We should care about poverty and homelessness and addiction and disease. We should work for shalom here, now, and as long as we have breath. We have to preach and pursue full redemption.

But here's something else we have to keep in mind, something closely related. We also have to care about two things: both justification and justice. Now back to the biggest news story of the week. After Amber Guyger's sentencing, the brother of the victim, Brandt Jean, spoke words of forgiveness over her and gave her a long hug. It was a pretty beautiful moment. I, like many, shared the video. It was a beautiful picture of the forgiveness of Christ and the forgiveness He works in our hearts. But immediately, folks like Jemar Tisby and others urged us to be careful - to not so speedily run to celebrate forgiveness and to so quickly forget the need for change. He writes, in the *Washington Post*.

What is lost in the tearful embrace between a murdered man's brother and the killer are the words of Botham's mother. "There is much to be done by the city of Dallas," she said. "The corruption that we saw during this process must stop." Instant absolution minimizes the magnitude of injustice. It distracts attention from the systemic change needed to prevent such tragedies from occurring. The same Bible that urges forgiveness also urges justice. (Jemar Tisby)

Justice. Now I wouldn't say we're good at it. No. But we know far more about preaching justification. What does that mean? How to get right with God. By faith. Through Christ's perfect life applied to us. And His sacrificial death given in our place. If we're justified, it means we're declared righteous by God. Forgiven. And that leads us to be people who forgive. Like Brandt Jean. Yes, we must cherish and teach justification.

But we also have to care about justice. And work for it. We have to look beyond the sins of individuals and see wicked structures in place. And seek to bring them down for the glory of God. Through our words. Through our actions. Some of you may have read the book *Divided by Faith* by Emerson and Smith. It interviews white evangelicals and black evangelicals and asks them about race relations. It's interesting, but unsurprising.

All the white believers put the emphasis on personal responsibility. Black Christians, on the other hand, point to unjust structures in society. Basically, one side says, justification is the answer. The other points to justice. But maybe it's both. And most of us are white here. Maybe we have a massive blind spot.

Eric Mason, in his great book, *Woke Church*, explains how closely related justification is to justice and why we need to pursue both. He writes:

"We have to be careful about placing limitations on the attributes of God. In Western theology, we tend to lack a comprehensive view of God's perfections, particularly righteousness/justice and even our understanding of justification. Justification is a huge greenhouse of truth that extends beyond "being declared righteous"! Justified isn't merely a position, but a practice! Christ's righteousness being imputed to us by faith leads to our being made right with God as well as our making things right on earth—knowing that Jesus will return and bring to completion the work that He has been doing through His people." (Eric Mason)

Eric then quotes Nicholas Wolterstorff. Check this out:

"Shalom is the human being dwelling at peace in all his or her relationships with God, with self, with fellows, with nature.... But the peace which is shalom is not merely the absence of hostility, not merely being in right relationship. Shalom at its highest is enjoyment in one's relationships.... Shalom in the first place incorporates right, harmonious relationships to God and delight in service....

Secondly, shalom incorporates right harmonious relationships to other human beings and delight in human community.... thirdly, shalom incorporates right, harmonious relationships to nature and delight in our physical surroundings.... Justice, the enjoyment of one's rights, is indispensable to shalom. [Therefore] justice is wounded when shalom is absent." (Nicholas Wolterstorff)

No justification, no peace. No justice, no peace. Both are essential, as we go out and say, "**Peace be with you.**"

But don't miss. In **verse 22**, after Jesus says these words, He breathes on His disciples and says, "**Receive the Holy Spirit.**" Now this is confusing. Sometime after this point, Jesus ascends to heaven. That's **Acts chapter one**. And then, in **chapter two**, God pours out His Spirit on His church. So here's the question: does Jesus give His Spirit here at the end of His ministry, to His disciples? Or later, after His ascension, to the church? Which is it? Or maybe does Jesus give them just a bit of His Spirit here? Hmm.

It's not like God's people didn't have the Spirit before. At Pentecost, we get it in a new way, in a powerful way. Think back to the incarnation again - Jesus putting on flesh. What happens at the beginning of His ministry? He's baptized and the Spirit comes to rest on Him. And then He goes out and ministers, as a man, but anointed, empowered by the Spirit. What's the good word here? Jesus is promising the disciples the same Holy Spirit. And we get to get in on it, too. Here, Jesus, with these words, is telling them what's about to come. And though this act, of breathing on them, is picturing this wind that's just around the corner.

The task we've been giving is too big for us. Sharing the gospel with people who don't want to hear it. Fighting against injustices that have been around far longer than we've been born.

One thing I don't enjoy too much about middle school is the homework. And no, I'm not the one doing it. I'm not Billy Madison. I'm not helping my kid cheat. But my son's math teacher has made for some pretty difficult evenings. "It's too much work! It's so hard! I don't understand!" Kid, that's the point. It's supposed to challenge you. If he gave you stuff you already knew, you wouldn't grow. Right? It's supposed to be too much for you.

But what we're talking about here is on a whole 'nother level. We can't make people forgive. We can't force people to believe. We can't fix all the ills of society with our bare hands. And that's the point. We need the Holy Spirit. As we proclaim. As we pursue. As the Lord says to Zechariah in **chapter 4, verse 6**, "**Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit.**"

What ends up happening is that we get to work, just like my kid, and it's too hard, and so we push the work away. Or we pull out the work we can already do. But the Lord wants us to experience His Spirit. Like those disciples, we're needy, too. And we're just as fearful. But, like them, we can be transformed - by the hope of the resurrection, by the presence of His Spirit.

Why are we all so cynical? Yes, there's this whole mentality out there, that says, "Put your mind to it, and you can do anything." Get the right leaders. Get people enough education. We'll be fine. But to most of us, that's pretty far-fetched. We look around, we see the insanity and injustice, and we feel powerless to change it. Or stop it. But to the people of God, He gives His Spirit.

What we need is prayer, Karis. If we read our Bibles, we know we're dependent upon the Lord, but we sure don't act like it. Jared Wilson says this:

"Prayer is expressed helplessness. When we're not engaged in prayer, it's because we feel like 'we got this.' The extent to which you are not engaged in prayer is the extent to which you are relying on your own strength." (Jared Wilson)

Karis, here's one thing that can keep me up at night. We grow up as a church, and we get more and more comfortable. We now have this beautiful building. We're surrounded by people that we love. And we stop doing hard things. We do things we can accomplish ourselves. We have no need for the Spirit. And we have less and less impact. Oh, Karis, let's fight against that. Christ offers to us peace. Let's preach that to each other. Jesus sends us with peace. Let's pray and trust His Spirit.

Recently, I came across an article that talked about drowning, and how to tell when someone was struggling in the water. Drowning doesn't look like drowning, the author says. We learn what it looks like by watching TV. It's not the "violent, splashing call for help that most people expect... It's almost always a deceptively quiet event." He writes:

"To get an idea of just how quiet and undramatic drowning can be, consider this: It is the number two cause of accidental death in children age 15 and under (just behind vehicle accidents). Of the approximately 750 children who will drown next year, about 375 of them will do so within 25 yards of a parent or other adult. In 10 percent of those drownings, the adult will actually watch them do it, having no idea it is happening." (Mario Vittonne)

People can't shout for help because they're struggling to breathe. They can't wave their arms, because they're using them to keep themselves afloat. If you look at someone and they stare back at you, the author says, ask if they're ok, and get there fast. You probably only have 30 seconds to save them.

Maybe you feel this way. You can't catch our breath. You don't have the strength to wave. All around us there are people feeling the same. They're drowning. And we have no idea. We're trying our best to show our gourmet meals and perfect children on Instagram, but we're dying inside. Christ offers to us peace. Jesus sends us with peace.

He comes to us. He comes to them. "***Peace be with you.***" He says, "***Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid***" (John 14:27). This fallen world throws at us trouble. Jesus gives us the resources to deal with it. Shalom is coming. Shalom is here.

I want to encourage you toward baby steps today. Open your Bible if you haven't in awhile. Talk to the Lord as you drive home from the store. Share your hurts with a friend over coffee. Recommit to live in community with your MC. Ask Him to give you His peace.

And ask Him to help you share that peace. Strike up a conversation with the parent next to you at that game. Talk about your church family with that student you always see in class. Make eye contact with that homeless man. Listen to His struggles and tell him where your peace is found. Ask Jesus to help you spread His peace.

I began talking about elephants. I want to end talking about dragons. G.K. Chesterton once said, "Fairytales do not tell children that dragons exist. Children already know that dragons exist. Fairytales tell children the dragons can be killed." Friends, there is a great dragon out there. An enemy. Who terrorizes us with sin, suffering, and death.

But this story is no fairytale. All those stories try to capture and express this reality we all feel, that none of us can avoid. Suffering can't be avoided. Sin kills. Every one of us. We can only treat it as an elephant so long. Soon enough, we'll see the animal's teeth.

But church of Jesus, there is one who came to slay that dragon. He defeated death. He'll usher in peace. We're meant to experience it now. And meant to extend it to others. And await the never-ending day of rest, of perfect shalom. We don't have to live - or die - in fear.

There's this line in that Isbell song. "There's one thing that's real clear to me. No one dies with dignity." And then he goes on: "We just try to ignore the elephant somehow." Now don't hear me saying that all Christians die with a smile on their face. But I have seen believers die, and it's not the same. It shouldn't be the same. We have hope. We can approach death - along with sin and suffering - with eyes of faith. Yes, with tears in those eyes, for sure. But eyes of faith.

Maybe you don't have eyes to see - at least right now. But *you want it to be true*. Look at His hands, His side. Receive His Spirit. Hear Him say, with love, "**Peace be with you.**"