

“The God of New Creation” (part 1)

Introduction: Forty days passed between the resurrection of Jesus and his ascension, his return to the Father. Why? Why did he hang around? Why not show yourself to your followers and then get the heck out of here? Who would want to hang around, when you’d just been crucified? Well, one of the reasons, as we said on Easter Sunday, was that the resurrection was not to simply be some sort of private, spiritual experience for the followers of Jesus, convincing them that death did not win. Rather, as Luke informs us in Acts 1:3, Jesus had more teaching to do around his favorite subject, the kingdom of God, and, it would seem, the part resurrection had to play in it.

What becomes clear, then, in the various resurrection appearances of Jesus, is that in the resurrection, God is inviting us to a whole new way of being and thinking and doing. Perhaps the clearest and most information packed of those appearances is recorded by Luke. There, as we will see, Jesus revealed that there was definitely something new going on as he offered his pardon, revealed God’s new creation perspective, charged his followers with his program, and promised them the Spirit’s power. Today we’ll look at the first these “four P’s” and consider how Christ’s “peace” invites us into a new way of being.

I. Pardon: “Peace be with you.”

A. This meeting took place in a room in Jerusalem shortly after Jesus had broken bread with those two weary and depressed followers on the road to Emmaus. Their experience with Jesus had caused them to run the seven miles all the way back to Jerusalem to report on what had happened. As they arrived, additional reports had begun to come in such that room must have felt something like a news room with calls and texts and tweets pouring in with updated information on a breaking story.

B. Try to imagine what the conversation in that room must have been like! The group included the Eleven, who, among other things, had been told by Jesus that they would all fall away after his arrest and crucifixion. They protested and claimed otherwise, but it had happened, just as he said. If he was alive, how anxious, really, were they to see him? How anxious are you to see someone whom you have wronged or offended? Generally, we want to run the other way! But the Eleven weren’t given a chance to do that because suddenly, in the midst of the buzz, Jesus was there in their midst.

C. As many a spiritual writer has commented, encountering God in his glory doesn’t always seem like good news. As Isaiah once declared, when the glory and holiness of God appeared before him, “Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips . . . and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty” (Isa. 6:5). When John experienced the risen Christ, while on the island of Patmos, this is how he describes it: “When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead” (Rev. 1:17).

D. To experience or recognize or come to understand Christ in his resurrection glory has a way of exposing all that old paint that still bleeds through in our lives. As a writer named Mark Galli has put it, “Some days the last thing I want is to meet the resurrected, glorious Christ. He just exposes too many flaws.” Interestingly, if you are one of those of you who has observed, over the course of our recent sermon series from the Sermon on the Mount, that it makes you uneasy, what has really happened is that you have met the risen, glorious, holy Christ in his word, and it’s not always comfortable!

E. But, as we go on to see, it is where true healing begins. God reached out and touched Isaiah's lips, taking his guilt away. He reached out and touched John and said, *Do not be afraid* . . . And to his flawed, guilt-ridden followers in that room in Jerusalem,, Jesus didn't scold them but just the opposite; he pronounced his peace, a word meant to convey wholeness or well-being. Essentially, it means forgiveness and salvation, it means grace, it means Gods undeserved favor. And it is where Jesus begins with any of us. If we want to know the newness that resurrection brings, after we comprehend the glory of the risen Christ and our own sinfulness in its light, we need to receive his peace, his pardon, as the pure gift that it is. It brings to light a whole new way of being, that of having Jesus meet us in our brokenness, touching us with his love, and then living from that love instead of for it. We need to recognize, as the apostle Paul puts it, "If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here!" (2 Cor. 5:17).

Understanding this is critical to our spiritual formation. I think of the church in Ephesus which, according to the way it was addressed in the opening section of Revelation, had lost its "first love" (2:4). It had begun well, as Paul's earlier letter to that congregation reveals, but in some fashion they had fallen back into a kind of works righteousness, their hard work and good deeds (v. 2) driving their life rather than the grace of God. It's so easy to fall back into that, but when we do, it puts us into a place of thinking we have to earn, or qualify for, God's love, which is no way to "be." It will leave us wondering, lead us to pride, and cause us to look down on others. Rather than live like that, the resurrection invites us to know that we are loved by a generous heavenly Father, to rest in that love, and to live from that.