

After the resurrection Jesus appeared to his disciples who were locked away out of fear. These were people who had lost hope, and were probably feeling pretty powerless in the face of the systemic violence they had witnessed, perpetrated by their religious leaders and the Roman occupiers. But Jesus tells them “Peace be with you. As God has sent me, so I send you.” In the midst of the fear and hopelessness, Jesus tells them that they will be empowered by the Spirit to make peace a reality – that same peace which Jesus proclaimed through word and deed.

Once again we have witnessed the brutal killing of a person of color at the hands of police. I can’t help feeling a sense of hopelessness in the face of the violence and disregard for life which in our society extends beyond just this one senseless act. I want to say to whoever will listen “Not again!” Or “Haven’t we learned anything from past incidents like this!” Or “Is prejudice and violence just an inescapable part of our nature as human beings?” Like the disciples, I sometimes want to lock myself away and give up believing anything can be different. Maybe a number of us are feeling this way.

If so, then this is exactly the time to allow the words of Jesus to break through the locked doors of our hopelessness and fear, and speak to us of the possibility of New Life. Jesus didn’t tell the disciples that they could eradicate all violence, war, and killing. Even Jesus could not do that. He did tell them that they could be peace in the world through their words and actions. That, he said, was possible, and was in fact their mission. As Jesus sent the disciples out to do this work, so he sends us out.

We cannot give up on being peace in our world. This work is far too important. One thing that can give us strength to keep going is a realistic sense of what we can do, of what is possible. I may not be able to heal race relations in the whole city, but I can treat each person I meet with respect and compassion. I may not be able to make a whole organization change and not be racially biased. But I may be able to publicly highlight institutional prejudice when it happens and express how it violates the gospel message. Focusing on what we can accomplish helps us continue the work.

Another thing that helps us not give up is to do the work together. There is strength in numbers. This strength is not only the power to get something accomplished, but to give us as individuals strength of heart, soul, mind, and Spirit so we don’t weaken and give up.

Ultimately what keeps us going is our faith. It is our faith in the words of Jesus when he says “As God has sent me, so I send you.” We need to trust that Jesus has given us what we need to do the same work that Jesus did, and which he still does through the workings of the Spirit. With that faith we realize that it is not just us fighting a hopeless battle against violence, hate, and prejudice. With that faith we know that it is the Spirit of Jesus working through us to bring peace to whomever our words, actions, and lives touch. That is important work.

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