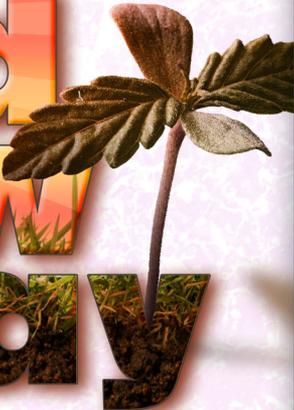


GOING DEEPER
DISCUSSION GUIDE
April 27, 2014

**Brand
New
Day**



Discussion Guide

No Ghosts of the Past

John 20.19-23

Connecting:

45 minutes

(The following questions are intended to provide your group with a way of connecting with one another so that you might partner in the work God is doing in your lives.)

- In what ways did God move in your life this week? In what ways did you respond to him?
- What was your biggest challenge this week? In what ways, if any, did you invite God into this challenge?
- How honest have you been with us? (Graciously thank group members for their honesty if they answer that they have held back.)

Getting Started:

10 minutes

- What would you say is your biggest fear? Could you elaborate?

Diving Into the Text:

60 minutes

(The following questions are intended to provide your group with a simple road map through the text. Feel free to use these questions in ways that best fit your group and the dynamics of your own meeting.)

- Use the notes to set the scene for John 20 to explain the context and the nature of peace.
- Read John 20.19-23 aloud slowly, seeking to experience and imagine the scene unfolding. Pause and read John 20.19-23 aloud slowly once more, seeking to be present with the disciples and Jesus as the text describes.

- What reasons do the disciples have for being afraid? In what ways, if any, does their fear lead them to get stuck?
- In what ways does Jesus address the disciples' fear? Their stuckness?
- What do people fear? In what ways, if any, does their fear lead them to become stuck? What is the effect on their lives?
- What, if anything, can help these people get unstuck?
- Consider those things which you fear. In what ways, if any, do your fears lead you to get stuck? Would you elaborate?
- Jesus offers his presence as a gift of peace in the midst of our fear. Sit and be still for a moment. Imagine Jesus standing before you and granting you his peace. What feelings, if any, does Jesus' presence and blessing evoke in you?
- Does having Jesus and his peace with you in the present make it easier for you to move into the future? Would you elaborate?
- What might make it easier for you to move into the future, even in the face of fear? Listen to Jesus' promise of presence and peace once more. In what ways, if any, does Jesus' presence and promise provide that which you desire and need to move forward?
- Close your group by sitting silently in God's presence for a few moments and then stating the following: "Christ has been with us in our past. Christ is with us in our present. Christ will be with us when our future becomes our present. Christ is with us. Let us go in his peace."

Context and Background

Peace

In our modern setting, peace has come to mean the cessation or absence of hostility. As long as people are not fighting, the claim is made that peace exists. However, in the biblical sense, peace includes much more than the absence of hostility. The basic idea of the biblical word “peace” is a state of completeness or wholeness. This basic idea of completeness is rooted in the state of creation before the Fall. Before the entrance of Sin, the world existed in a state of peace; that is, the world was whole and complete, in the state it was intended to exist by God. After the Fall, peace was broken because the world was broken. However, Christ’s ministry brought about the possibility that peace might once more be experienced (Luke 1.79; 24.36; Mark 5.34; John 14.27; 16.33; Romans 5.1; Philippians 4.7). Jesus’ ministry to bring about the possibility of peace is seen most clearly in his healings, physical signs of lives being made whole. As the followers of Jesus go forth, they do so with a gospel message of peace (Ephesians 6.15) and the present possession of peace in their person (Romans 8.6; Colossians 3.15). The lives of Jesus’ followers are to serve as physical signs to the world of how God is about the business of making lives whole (peace).

The Text

John 20.19-20: No fear in the present

After Jesus’ post-resurrection appearance to Mary Magdalene (John 20.11-17), Mary took the good news of her experience along with Jesus’ message of deeper relational intimacy—Jesus is now brother!—to the disciples (John 20.18). While we would expect Mary’s report to cause great excitement among the disciples, the actual response is one of fear. After hearing from Mary, the disciples hid in a room (the upper room?) behind a locked door. Their fear is rooted in the potential response of the Jewish leaders. More than likely, the disciples were afraid that these leaders would extend their efforts to rid themselves not just of Jesus but to rid themselves of all remnants of Jesus’ followers in a systematic pogrom. Further, the disciples were probably afraid of retaliation from these leaders should they hear the report that Jesus’ body was missing coupled with Mary’s report that Jesus had risen. This report would make it appear that God had vindicated Jesus, casting the Jewish leaders in a negative light for putting a good man to death.

Bound (literally behind locked doors) with fear, the disciples suddenly recognized that Jesus was standing among them. Somehow locked doors posed no issue for Jesus when he wished to enter. Jesus wished his disciples peace. This wish is more than a simple greeting but is more akin to a blessing. Jesus did more than calm his disciples at this point. He spoke wholeness to them, not unlike his miracles of healing during his ministry. (See Peace.) This blessing of wholeness addressed the paralyzing fear which had fallen upon the disciples. Jesus then demonstrated the basis for his peace blessing by showing his disciples his risen body, complete with the marks of the crucifixion. Jesus’ actions effectively provide the disciples with tangible proof that the disciples had nothing to fear from the Jewish leaders. These men had killed Jesus, but he was standing among his disciples very

much alive. This physical reminder stood in many ways as proof of Jesus' peace wish in John 16.33. He really had overcome! Second, Jesus' physical presence reminded the disciples that they had peace because he was with them, with them even in their moments of fear.

John 20.21-23: No fear of the future

Jesus spoke once more, granting a second blessing of peace. His reasoning for this second peace blessing is found in the next phrase, a phrase which would once more disturb the disciples and paralyze them with fear. He was sending them forth to carry on his mission and message in the same method he had. Jesus was sending his followers forth to preach boldly, care for the outcasts, heal the sick and possessed, and to confront the religious powers. This very mission and message had resulted in Jesus' arrest, suffering, and death. Suddenly, the disciples' future looked dismal, and for good reason! Even with this future before them, Jesus provided a blessing of peace. They could have peace because they would have the Holy Spirit. Jesus' actions at this point have given rise to much debate, particularly as scholars have sought to harmonize this passage with Acts 2. It is perhaps best to understand Jesus' actions to serve as a promise of the Holy Spirit coupled with a symbolic gesture of breath (wind). When the disciples would receive the Holy Spirit, they would discover a new reality, the ability to shape the world and the future. They would have the ability to labor in a manner that would bring about forgiveness. While some have interpreted these verses to mean that the people of God may actually forgive or not forgive sin, it is better to understand Jesus to be speaking about the ministry of the gospel and its result.

The disciples would have the power to carry out Jesus' Kingdom ministry in a way that brought about God's intended and transforming work of forgiveness, the bringing of wholeness. Thus, the future was not dismal but hopeful.

Application:

Fear is a powerful emotion. Fear drives. Fear divides. Fear paralyzes. We fear what surrounds us, forces outside of our control that threaten to harm and hinder us. Most often, our greatest fear is not what is but what might be. We fear the future, the unknown forces and events which threaten to unseat and shatter our lives. In the midst of our fear, Jesus brings the blessing of peace. More than a far-off wish, Jesus brings the actual experience of peace, because in our fearful circumstances Jesus is present, showing us that even the most horrific of events cannot once and for all overcome God's people. Jesus is not only present but he grants us his Spirit which enables and empowers us to move forward into our future. When our future becomes our present, we discover that by God's Spirit we have had a shaping influence on what is, transforming our future-present into something that is saturated with God's peace.

Want to know how this looks in real life? Check out Blake's blog at BlakeShipp.blogspot.com



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