



# Easter is

## GOING DEEPER

### DISCUSSION GUIDE

March 18, 2018

## Discussion Guide

### EASTER IS FREEDOM

#### 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 STATE THEY HAVE HELD BACK.)

#### GETTING STARTED:

10 MINUTES

- WHAT SCARES YOU THE MOST? WHAT IS IT LIKE FOR YOU TO EXPERIENCE THIS SITUATION?

#### 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.)

- USING THE NOTES, TALK ABOUT THE DEFINITION AND MEANING OF PEACE IN SCRIPTURE.
- READ JOHN 20.19-23 OUT LOUD. TRY TO IMAGINE YOURSELF AS ONE OF THE DISCIPLES, HIDING BECAUSE YOU ARE AFRAID OF THE JEWISH LEADERS. READ THE TEXT ONCE MORE.

- AS YOU READ THE TEXT AND SEEK TO BE PRESENT. WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE ONE OF THE DISCIPLES? WHAT ARE YOU FEELING OR EXPERIENCING? WHY MIGHT THIS BE THE CASE?
- AS A DISCIPLE HIDING IN FEAR, JESUS GIVE YOU PEACE. WHAT EFFECTS IS THIS GIFT OF PEACE MEANT TO HAVE? SEEK TO FIND AS MANY ANSWERS AS POSSIBLE IN THE TEXT.
- IN YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF PEACE, HOW MIGHT JESUS' GIFT OF PEACE LEAD TO THESE OUTCOMES?
- IT HAS BEEN SAID THAT THE PRESENCE OF PEACE FREES PEOPLE FROM FEAR. DO YOU THINK PEOPLE TODAY STRUGGLE WITH FEAR? WHAT EFFECTS DOES IT HAVE UPON THEM?
- DO YOU FEEL THE CHURCH TODAY STRUGGLES WITH FEAR? WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OR SIGNS OF THIS FEAR?
- HOW MIGHT POSSESSING PEACE ADDRESS THESE STRUGGLES?
- DO YOU STRUGGLE WITH FEAR? WHAT DOES FEAR DO IN YOUR LIFE?
- DO YOU FEEL JESUS' GIFT OF PEACE ADDRESSES THESE FEARS? COULD YOU ELABORATE?
- WHAT MIGHT IT BE LIKE TO LIVE FREE FROM FEAR? DO YOU FEEL IT IS POSSIBLE? COULD YOU EXPLAIN?
- CONSIDER CONCLUDING BY DISCUSSING THOSE THINGS OF WHICH YOU ARE AFRAID IN AN HONEST AND AUTHENTIC MANNER. RATHER THAN CORRECTING OR FIXING, SIMPLY RECEIVE THESE THINGS AS A GROUP FROM ONE ANOTHER. YOU MIGHT THEN CONSIDER BLESSING ONE ANOTHER WITH GOD'S PEACE, ASKING GOD TO GRANT PEACE WHERE THERE IS FEAR.

## CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

### PEACE

FOR MANY MODERN PERSONS, PEACE IS DEFINED POSITIVELY AS THE PRESENCE OF TRANQUILITY AND NEGATIVELY AS THE ABSENCE OF CONFLICT OR TURMOIL. THUS, TO BE AT PEACE IS TO EXPERIENCE A STATE OF CALM REGARDLESS OF THE SOURCE. IN SCRIPTURE, PEACE CAN MEAN THE PRESENCE OF CALM SUCH AS CESSATION FROM WAR (JOSHUA 9.15) OR THE ENDING OF STRIFE EXTERNALLY OR INTERNALLY (ISAIAH 26.12; JOB 22.21). HOWEVER, ITS PRIMARY MEANING INVOLVES THE PRESENCE OF SOUNDNESS OR WHOLENESS, SOMETHING AUGUSTINE DEFINED AS A TRANQUILITY OF ORDER (CITY OF GOD 19.13). THEREFORE, TO BE AT PEACE IS TO EXPERIENCE A COMPLETE STATE OF WHOLENESS, A WHOLENESS WHICH CAN BE EXPERIENCED EVEN IN THE PRESENCE OF CONFLICT OR TURMOIL.

THROUGHOUT SCRIPTURE, THE ULTIMATE SOURCE OF PEACE IS PRESENTED AS GOD WHO IS MOVING TO BRING PEACE TO EARTH THROUGH HIS MESSIAH (ZECHARIAH 9.9; ISAIAH 9.6). THE NEW TESTAMENT PRESENTS CHRIST AS GOD'S MESSIAH WHO NOT ONLY WAS SENT TO BRING GOD'S PEACE (LUKE 1.79; 2.14; MARK 5.34) BUT HE IN FACT GAVE THIS GIFT OF PEACE TO HIS FOLLOWERS (JOHN 14.27; 16.33; ROMANS 5.1; PHILIPPIANS 4.7). THIS GIFT OF PEACE IS NOT SOMETHING SEPARATE FROM CHRIST BUT IS EXPERIENCED AS ONE RECEIVES CHRIST (EPHESIANS 2.14-15); THAT IS, GOD HIMSELF IS PEACE, THE SOURCE OF WHOLENESS AND SOUNDNESS (JOHN 14.27; 20.19-23). THUS, TO PROCLAIM CHRIST IS TO PROCLAIM A GOSPEL OF PEACE (EPHESIANS 6.15) AND TO PROCLAIM GOD'S REDEMPTIVE MOVEMENT IS TO PROCLAIM A MOVEMENT WHICH WILL BRING UNQUALIFIED WELL-BEING TO THIS WORLD.

### THE TEXT

#### JOHN 20.19-23: RESURRECTION LIFE IS A FREED LIFE

THE RESURRECTION APPEARANCES OF JESUS TO HIS DISCIPLES ARE PART OF JOHN'S MESSAGE INTENDED TO LEAD HIS READERS TO A FAITH WHICH RESULTS IN THE EXPERIENCE OF ETERNAL LIFE IN THE PRESENT (JOHN 20.31). MOST LIKELY, JOHN INTENDS TO USE THESE STORIES NOT SIMPLY TO DEMONSTRATE THE VERACITY OF JESUS' RESURRECTION BUT TO PORTRAY THE NATURE OF RESURRECTION LIFE NOW AVAILABLE TO BELIEVERS ON ACCOUNT OF JESUS' RESURRECTION. 1

JOHN BEGAN HIS SERIES OF STORIES WITH MARY, DEMONSTRATING THAT RESURRECTION LIFE IS A LIFE WHICH INVOLVES CHANGE/TRANSFORMATION TOWARD GOD'S INTENDED LIFE (JOHN 20.11-18). HOWEVER, THE SEEDS FOR HIS SECOND STORY ARE SOWN IN THIS FIRST STORY. ALTHOUGH MARY HAS ALREADY CALLED THE DISCIPLES TO WITNESS THE EMPTY TOMB (JOHN

20.1-10) AND TESTIFIED TO HAVING SEEN THE RESURRECTED JESUS (JOHN 20.18), THE DISCIPLES REFUSE TO BELIEVE NOR ARE THEY EMBOLDENED. INSTEAD, THE DISCIPLES REMAIN HIDDEN BEHIND LOCKED DOORS BECAUSE THEY ARE AFRAID OF THE JEWISH LEADERS. THE NATURE OF THEIR FEAR IS UNDERSTANDABLE AND TWO-FOLD. FIRST, THE DISCIPLES ARE AFRAID OF THESE LEADERS BECAUSE THEY WERE ABLE TO MANIPULATE THE LEVERS OF POWER TO EXECUTE JESUS. IT WAS NOT UNTHINKABLE THAT THESE SAME LEADERS MIGHT WISH TO FURTHER PURGE THEMSELVES OF ANY VESTIGES OF THE JESUS-MOVEMENT, AND THE EVENTS OF THE PREVIOUS DAYS DEMONSTRATED THEY HAD THE POWER TO DO IT. SECOND, THE DISCIPLES' FEAR PROBABLY INCREASED UPON RECEIVING MARY'S REPORTS. TAMPERING WITH GRAVES IN THE 1ST CENTURY WAS PUNISHABLE BY DEATH. A FIRST-CENTURY ORDINANCE PURPORTEDLY FROM CAESAR AND FOUND NEAR NAZARETH STATED:

*FOR BEYOND ALL ELSE IT SHALL BE OBLIGATORY TO HONOR THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN BURIED. LET NO ONE REMOVE THEM FOR ANY REASON. IF ANYONE DOES SO, HOWEVER, IT IS MY WILL THAT HE SHALL SUFFER CAPITAL PUNISHMENT ON THE CHARGE OF TOMB ROBBERY. (SEG 8.13 NAZARETH, METZGER 1980, 77)*

MARY'S INSISTENCE THAT JESUS' BODY WAS GONE, ECSTATICALLY REPORTING HE WAS IN FACT ALIVE, WOULD HAVE INSTILLED FEAR IN THE DISCIPLES. THEY COULD BE ACCUSED OF GRAVE ROBBERY AND THUS FACE ADDITIONAL THREATS OF DEATH.

SUDDENLY, JESUS IS FOUND TO BE AMONG THOSE DISCIPLES WHO WERE HIDING. HOW JESUS GOT INSIDE A ROOM WHICH WAS LOCKED IS NOT DETAILED THOUGH MANY INTERPRETERS HAVE SOUGHT TO CONCLUDE THAT JESUS' RESURRECTION BODY COULD MATERIALIZE OR WALK THROUGH WALLS. JOHN MAKES NO SUCH CLAIM AND TO SEEK TO UNDERSTAND THE NATURE OF JESUS' BODY IS BEYOND THE POINT JOHN IS SEEKING TO MAKE. JOHN'S POINT IS TO BE DISCOVERED IN JESUS' TWICE REPEATED WISH OF PEACE.

THE TYPICAL JEWISH GREETING OF THE DAY WAS THAT OF PEACE UPON A PERSON (GENESIS 29.6; EXODUS 4.18; LUKE 24.36). HOWEVER, THAT JESUS REPEATED THIS STATEMENT INDICATES HE HAS SOMETHING GREATER IN MIND THAN SAYING "HELLO." IN DISCOVERING JESUS' INTENT, IT IS HELPFUL TO REMEMBER THAT DURING JESUS' FINAL DISCOURSE WITH HIS DISCIPLES, HE BLESSED THEM WITH PEACE (JOHN 14.27). THIS PEACE WHICH HE PROMISED TO GIVE WAS ASSOCIATED WITH THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. IT WAS A PEACE UNLIKE THAT WHICH THE WORLD OFFERED, AND IT WAS SUCH THAT THE DISCIPLES NO LONGER HAD TO BE AFRAID. ECHOES OF THIS TEXT ARE READILY APPARENT IN THE PRESENT SETTING. THE DISCIPLES ARE AFRAID. THEIR FEAR HAS DRIVEN THEM INTO HIDING. IT IS NOT SURPRISING THAT JESUS REMINDS THEM OF THE PEACE WHICH HE HAS GIVEN THEM.

THE NATURE OF THE DISCIPLES' FEAR HAS TO DO WITH THAT WHICH THE JEWISH LEADERS CAN INFLICT UPON THEM: DEATH. IS IT

THEREFORE SURPRISING THAT JESUS SHOWS THE DISCIPLES HIS HANDS AND SIDE, SIGNS OF HIS CRUCIFIXION? WHILE MANY TAKE THIS TO BE JESUS' ATTEMPT TO UNDERScore HIS TRUE IDENTITY, THIS LINE OF THOUGHT MAKES LITTLE SENSE FOR HIS AUDIENCE. OTHER THAN JOHN, THE DISCIPLES WERE NOT PRESENT FOR THE CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS. THEY HAD NOT SEEN THE TYPE OF DEATH HE DIED OR WITNESSED THE PLUNGING OF THE SPEAR INTO HIS SIDE. RATHER, THESE ARE SHOWN TO THE DISCIPLES AS EVIDENCE OF THE WORST THE JEWISH LEADERS CAN INFLICT UPON A PERSON, AND YET, JESUS IS STANDING AMONG THEM ALIVE. THEREFORE, THE JOYOUS RESPONSE OF THE DISCIPLES IS NOT SIMPLY TO HAVE JESUS BACK BUT TO UNDERSTAND THAT THE JEWISH LEADERS DO NOT HAVE POWER OVER THEM. IN OTHER WORDS, THE JEWISH LEADERS CAN INFLICT PAIN AND DEATH, BUT THEY DO NOT HAVE THE FINAL SAY OVER GOD'S ANOINTED. LIFE CAN GO ON. THIS IS THE SUBSTANCE OF THE PEACE JESUS GIVES. HE GIVES THE AWARENESS THAT GOD, NOT THE JEWISH LEADERS, HAS THE FINAL SAY, AND DEMONSTRATES THAT REAL LIFE CAN BE LIVED EVEN WHEN THESE LEADERS POUR FORTH ALL OF THEIR VENOM UPON THE PEOPLE OF GOD. JESUS' GIFT OF PEACE IS THEREFORE LIFE, REAL RESURRECTED LIFE, EVEN IN THE EXPERIENCE OF PAIN, DEFEAT, AND DEATH.

THIS GIFT OF PEACE IS IN THE POSSESSION OF THE DISCIPLES, GIVEN TO THEM BY JESUS. THEREFORE, JESUS SENDS THEM FORTH, COMMISSIONING THEM TO DO WHAT THE FATHER SENT HIM TO DO. ONE MUST HEAR THE HANDING OFF OF JESUS' REDEMPTIVE MISSION TO THE DISCIPLES WHICH INCLUDES NOT ONLY GOSPEL PROCLAMATION BUT HEALING AND THE FORMING OF COMMUNITIES OF FAITH. TO ASSURE THE DISCIPLES THAT THE PEACE HE HAS PROMISED IS TRULY THEIRS, JESUS BREATHS OUT AND EXHORTS THEM TO RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT. THIS IS CLEARLY AN ECHO OF JOHN 14, BUT IT HAS LED TO A MUCH-HEATED DEBATE OVER WHEN THE DISCIPLES RECEIVED THE HOLY SPIRIT, HERE OR IN ACTS 2. IT IS MOST LIKELY THAT JESUS IS PROMISING THE HOLY SPIRIT'S COMING AND HERE IS PREPARING THE DISCIPLES FOR THIS EVENT. THOUGH NOT WITHOUT ITS ISSUES, THIS SUGGESTION MAKES THE BEST OF THOMAS' ABSENCE (JOHN 20.24) BECAUSE TO GIVE THE SPIRIT WITHOUT THOMAS PRESENT LEAVES THOMAS WITHOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT. FURTHER, IT MAKES LITTLE SENSE TO SAY THAT JOHN HAS CONFLATED ACTS 2 INTO THIS RESURRECTION ACCOUNT BECAUSE IT PLACES PENTECOST TOO CLOSE TO THE RESURRECTION, SOMETHING WHICH ANY FIRST-CENTURY CHRIST-FOLLOWER WOULD HAVE NOTICED AND REJECTED.

WITH THE GIFT OF WHOLENESS IN THE FACE OF TROUBLE AND THE PRESENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, JESUS REMINDS THE DISCIPLES THAT THE FULFILLMENT OF THEIR MISSION HAS ETERNAL CONSEQUENCES. THEY CAN FORGIVE OR WITHHOLD FORGIVENESS. WHAT JESUS SAYS HERE IS NOT UNLIKE JESUS' PROCLAMATION TO PETER ABOUT BINDING AND LOOSING (MATTHEW 16.19).

WHAT JESUS MEANS HERE IS SOMEWHAT ENIGMATIC. IT SUFFICES TO SAY THAT JESUS IS EMPHASIZING THE GREAT POWER HELD BY THE CHURCH AS IT EXERCISES ITS MISSION.

IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THE EFFECT PEACE IS MEANT TO HAVE BOTH IN JOHN 14 AND IN THE PRESENT TEXT. IN BOTH INSTANCES, PEACE IS INTENDED TO FREE THE DISCIPLES FROM FEAR. FEAR IS THE EXPERIENCE OF TERROR IN THE FACE OF DANGER OR TRAUMA. FEAR IS AN EMOTION, BUT IT IS A BODILY EMOTION. FEAR IS FELT, AND ITS SENSATIONS CAN HAVE NOTICEABLE BODILY EFFECTS. WHATEVER THE EFFECTS, THE END RESULT OF FEAR IS CONTROL. FEAR CONTROLS THE THINKING AND ACTIONS OF PEOPLE, STEERING THEM AWAY FROM DANGER; THAT IS, FEAR LEADS PEOPLE TO BEHAVE IN SPECIFIC WAYS. IT IS NOT SURPRISING THAT FEAR IS THEREFORE USED TO CONTROL PEOPLE. SUCH IS THE CASE IN THE PRESENT TEXT. THE FEAR OF THE JEWISH LEADERS IS CONTROLLING THE DISCIPLES. RATHER THAN GOING FORTH AS THE POWERFUL CHURCH, THOSE EQUIPPED AND EMPOWERED TO ENGAGE IN THE REDEMPTIVE WORK OF GOD, THE DISCIPLES ARE HIDING BEHIND LOCKED DOORS. JESUS REMINDS THEM THAT THEY POSSESS PEACE, SOMETHING WHICH FREES THEM FROM FEAR. THE POSSESSION OF PEACE IS POWERFUL IN THE FACE OF FEAR BECAUSE TO POSSESS PEACE IS TO POSSESS WHOLENESS, UNQUALIFIED WELL-BEING. THIS SPEAKS TO THE EXPERIENCE OF FEAR BECAUSE THAT WHICH WE FEAR IS THAT WHICH THREATENS TO UNDO US, TO LEAD US AWAY FROM WELL-BEING. HOWEVER, IF ONE POSSESSES WHOLENESS, A GIFT NOT DEPENDENT UPON CIRCUMSTANCES OR EXPERIENCES, THAT PERSON IS FREED TO ACT AS THEY WISH IN THE FACE OF ANY THREAT OR CIRCUMSTANCE. THEREFORE, PEACE FREES THE DISCIPLES TO MOVE FORTH AND BE THE CHURCH, TO FULFILL THEIR MISSION BY EXERCISING THE GREAT POWER GIVEN TO THEM BY GOD.

## REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:

FOR CHRISTIANS, EASTER IS IMPORTANT. IT IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE ON EASTER WE CELEBRATE THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS AND THIS RESURRECTION POINTS TO THE LIFE GOD HAS NOW MADE AVAILABLE TO US. WHILE JESUS' INTERACTION WITH MARY DEMONSTRATES THAT THIS LIFE NOW AVAILABLE INVOLVES THE EXPERIENCE OF REAL CHANGE, JESUS' INTERACTIONS WITH THE DISCIPLES BEHIND LOCKED DOORS INVITES US TO REALIZE THAT RESURRECTION LIFE INVOLVES THE GIFT OF PEACE. RIGHT NOW, WE CAN BE WHOLE. WE CAN LIVE IN A STATE OF UNQUALIFIED WELL-BEING. THE QUESTION IS WHY THIS MIGHT BE IMPORTANT. I WANT TO BE WHOLE. MOST PEOPLE I KNOW DO. THERE ARE FEW PEOPLE THAT I KNOW THAT FEEL THEY HAVE IT ALL TOGETHER, WHO FEEL THAT THEIR LIFE IS FULLY SORTED OUT. ALL OF US HAVE A WOUND OR TWO OR TEN WHICH NEVER SEEM TO HEAL. WE ARE BROKEN AND BATTERED AND BLOODED IN COUNTLESS WAYS. TO BE AT PEACE IS TO HAVE THESE OUT-OF-SORT AREAS OF OUR LIFE BE RIGHTLY ORDERED. THAT IS WONDERFUL, AND

THOSE WHO OPEN THEMSELVES TO GOD'S MOVEMENT IN THEM CAN SPEAK TO THE TRUE WONDER OF THIS PEACE. WE ALL WANT THIS, BUT WHAT I AM COMING TO REALIZE IS THAT THIS GIFT OF PEACE IS NOT WITHOUT ITS PURPOSE. WE ARE NOT GIVEN PEACE SIMPLY TO BE WHOLE. WE ARE GIVEN PEACE, SO WE MIGHT BE FREE.

IN THIS WORLD, WE LIVE OUR BATTERED LIVES IN FEAR, IN FEAR OF THE VERY THINGS WHICH BATTERED US IN THE FIRST PLACE. FEAR HAS AN INTERESTING EFFECT UPON US. IT CONTROLS US. FEAR DOESN'T JUST QUICKEN OUR BREATH AND TORMENT OUR THOUGHTS. FEAR LITERALLY CONTROLS OUR BEHAVIOR, TURNING US AWAY FROM THAT WHICH WE FEAR WILL FURTHER BREAK US. FEAR IS POWERFUL AND PEOPLE WHO HAVE LEARNED OF ITS POWER HAVE USED IT TO CONTROL OTHERS, LEADING THEM TO BEHAVE IN THE WAY THEY DEEM BEST. HERE IS THE PROBLEM. WE CAN'T BE THE CHURCH WHEN WE ARE AFRAID. TO BE THE CHURCH IS TO CARRY FORTH THE REDEMPTIVE MISSION OF JESUS. BEFORE WE IDEALIZE THIS TOO MUCH, LET'S REMEMBER THAT THE REDEMPTIVE MISSION OF JESUS DIDN'T JUST INVOLVE SPEAKING. IT INVOLVED HEALING PEOPLE'S LIVES. IT MEANT HANGING OUT WITH THE WRONG PEOPLE, MAKING THEM FAMILY. IT MEANT CALLING OUT INJUSTICE AND CONDEMNING UNRIGHTEOUSNESS IN THOSE WHO HAD POWER. IT WAS A WONDERFUL MINISTRY WHICH PUT JESUS ON A COLLISION COURSE WITH THE RELIGIOUS ELITE, A COURSE WHICH ENDED IN HIS DEATH. THAT IS THE CONTEXT AND TRAJECTORY OF JESUS' MINISTRY. ANYONE WHO HAS TRACED ITS COURSE HAS DISCOVERED IT TO BE TRUE. TO CARRY FORTH THE REDEMPTIVE MINISTRY OF GOD WILL LEAD ONE TO RIDICULE, PERSECUTION, EXCLUSION AND WORSE. PERHAPS THIS IS WHY FEW TRULY CARRY IT OUT. I KNOW THIS IS TRUE IN MY LIFE.

I AM FINE WITH TELLING PEOPLE GOD LOVES THEM OR HELPING PEOPLE EXPERIENCE THE HEALING OF GOD. WHERE IT GETS STICKY FOR ME IS IN HANGING OUT WITH THE WRONG PEOPLE AND SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER (CALLING OUT INJUSTICE). IN MY EXPERIENCE, HANGING OUT WITH THE WRONG PEOPLE GETS YOU A BAD REPUTATION, ONE FROM WHICH YOU CAN RARELY BE FREE. SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER GETS YOU KILLED, AT LEAST FIGURATIVELY. THIS WAS THE CASE IN THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT WHICH IS PERHAPS WHY THE CHURCH WAS SILENT. COULD IT BE THAT THE CHURCH'S CONTINUED SILENCE, AND MY OWN, IN SIMILAR SITUATIONS TODAY IS BECAUSE WE ARE AFRAID OF DEATH OR RIDICULE? WE ARE AFRAID OF PEOPLE LEAVING OUR CHURCHES OR BEING LABELED AS HATE-SPEECH OR WORSE BY OUR CULTURE. WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN IF WE TRULY SPOKE ABOUT SCHOOL VIOLENCE, THE ABSENCE OF CHARACTER IN POLITICS, THE PRESENT RACIAL INEQUALITIES OR MORE? WE DON'T KNOW BECAUSE WE/I DON'T SPEAK. WE ARE AFRAID. FEAR HOLDS US AT BAY. FEAR IS USED TO HOLD US AT BAY. PEACE FREES US FROM FEAR. PEACE FREES US TO SPEAK, TO ACT, TO BE ON MISSION BECAUSE REGARDLESS OF WHAT PEOPLE DO TO US, WE ARE WHOLE AND CAN BE WHOLE. OUR WHOLENESS IS A GIFT FROM GOD, NOT A

CALCULUS OF OUR CIRCUMSTANCES OR EXPERIENCES. IF THIS IS THE CASE, AND I AM INCREASINGLY BELIEVING IT IS TRUE, THEN WHAT JUST MIGHT BE POSSIBLE IF WE WENT FORTH AS THE CHURCH?

## REAL LIFE WITH YOU:

EVERY YEAR WE CELEBRATE EASTER. BUT WHY? WE CELEBRATE EASTER BECAUSE OF JESUS' RESURRECTION, A LIFE WHICH POINTS TO THE LIFE NOW AVAILABLE TO US. PART OF THIS LIFE INVOLVES THE GIFT OF PEACE. WE CAN NOW BE WHOLE. MOST OF US LONG TO BE WHOLE, TO HAVE OUR LIVES RIGHTLY SORTED AND ORDERED. HOWEVER, PEACE HAS A PURPOSE. GOD'S GIFT OF PEACE IS INTENDED TO FREE US TO BE THE CHURCH, TO FREE US FROM FEAR. FEAR IS A POWERFUL EMOTION, AN EMOTION WHICH HAS IMPLICATIONS IN OUR BODIES AND BEHAVIORS. FEAR CONTROLS US AND IS USED TO CONTROL US. IN THIS WORLD, FEAR KEEPS US AND IS USED TO KEEP US FROM BEING THE CHURCH, FROM CARRYING OUT THE REDEMPTIVE MISSION OF GOD. PERHAPS THIS IS SEEN MOST READILY IN THE MODERN CHURCH'S RELUCTANCE TO ENGAGE IN SOCIAL ISSUES FOR FEAR OF ANGERING CONGREGANTS OR CULTURE. THIS FEAR IS NOT UNFOUNDED. CONGREGANTS VOTE WITH THEIR FEET, LEAVING CONGREGATIONS WHO TAKE STANDS WITH WHICH THEY DO NOT AGREE. CULTURE CAN HEAP INCREDIBLE AMOUNTS OF SCORN, LABELING AND VILIFYING CONGREGATIONS. BECAUSE THIS IS TRUE, THE CHURCH OFTEN REMAINS SILENT AND PASSIVE. THEY ARE AFRAID, AFRAID OF BEING PUT FURTHER OUT OF SORTS. HOWEVER, THE POWER OF JESUS' GIFT OF PEACE IS THAT AN ORDERED AND WHOLE LIFE DOES NOT DEPEND ON EXTERNAL CIRCUMSTANCES OR EXPERIENCES. JESUS HIMSELF WAS CRUCIFIED. HE BORE THE MARKS AND YET HE POSSESSED PEACE. THIS IS THE KIND OF PEACE JESUS' RESURRECTION MAKES POSSIBLE. IF SUCH PEACE IS POSSIBLE THEN THE CHURCH IS FREED TO BE THE CHURCH. HOWEVER, TO BE THE CHURCH, THE CHURCH MUST FIRST ASK WHERE IT IS NOT BEING THE CHURCH. WHERE IS THE CHURCH BEING SILENT OR PASSIVE? WHY MIGHT THIS BE THE CASE? IF THE ANSWER COMES BACK TO FEAR, THEN WE MUST ASK OF WHAT WE ARE AFRAID AND WHETHER THIS FEAR HAS ANY REAL POWER OVER US, THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN GIVEN PEACE.



SENIOR  
PASTOR  
**BLAKE**  
SHIPP

 [twitter.com/blake\\_shipp](https://twitter.com/blake_shipp)

©2018 UNION CENTER CHRISTIAN CHURCH