

SERMON – 2ND EASTER
JOHN 20:19-31
APRIL 28, 2019
“BREATHE EVERYONE”

My grandparents lived in a frightfully tiny house – but it did have location! It sat half a block from the main entrance to the Minnesota State Fair. As a kid that meant one thing - sleepovers! Mom would arrange with her folks for me to have one every August, and the fair attending parts of those days were heaven - the sleepover part not so much. My Irish grandpa Bill Tuft was not an especially pleasant man to visit with and his quick temper was well known in the family. He was not a hard drinking man – but every afternoon around 4:00 PM he'd go the cupboard for a bottle of Irish whiskey, fill a shot glass, and then to the fridge for a bottle of Grain Belt beer – not full size, smaller ones - he used to call em “ponies.”

4:00 o'clock was Grandpa's shot and a beer time! Best not to mess with it I learned. One particularly hot year I took an afternoon break the fair, came back to the house, opened the fridge looking for who knows what, reached in and darn if I didn't bump loose a rack and down came a row of Grain Belt Ponies! Didn't matter if I was only 8 years old, I got an earful and it weren't no Irish blessing! I'm not sure how that would have ended if Grandma hadn't heard the commotion and come in the room. Now full disclaimer here – and with all respect to you folks of a certain ethnicity – but this could have gone from bad to worse real quick. Grandma you see was...German! Ever heard the phrase “*between a rock and a hard place?*”

There I was with Grandpa Bill cussing a blue streak, bottles of his afternoon delight leaking all over the fridge, and in rushes Grandma Minnie Emma Martha Bertha...Wadke! Except that Minnie, unlike her tough as nails husband, was soft and inviting as a pillow. She calmly told “pa” to remember “*he's just a little boy*”, reached in and removed the offending bottles of Grain Belt, returned the rack to its rightful if wobbly place, set the unbroken bottles back on it, and peace was restored – even if I was still shaking like a leaf on a tree! What I was expecting only moments before, anything from a firm swat on the butt to the end of my fair-going and banishment back to my own house, changed when Grandma entered the room.

The common perception of our story from John 20 is that Jesus' disciples were in an upper room the night of the resurrection, maybe sensing there was strength in numbers, but nonetheless fearful of a knock on the door from Jewish leaders eager to finish by whatever means any vestiges of this “*Jesus movement.*” That's not an entirely inappropriate interpretation – in fact it's precisely what John says – they were together behind locked doors “*for fear of the Jews.*”

But remember, by this time they'd also been told their Lord was alive – whether they believed the reports or not is unclear, but if true this would be the same Lord they'd all turned tail and ran from 72 hours earlier. In a beautiful reflection piece on this story, Professor Martyn Atkins of Cliff College, Sheffield, England suggests it's not entirely inconceivable that some of them, notably Peter, may very well have been fearful Jesus would show up! After denials, failures and shortcomings galore, encountering the risen Jesus might have been regarded as only marginally better than hearing members of the temple guard outside! The disciples might very well have figured *they* were between a rock and a hard place.

Just who, as Jesus had once asked them pointedly, did they think he was? What kind of “Messiah” was he? If, as some may have supposed, even hoped, he was a “just judge” bringing comeuppance on religious leaders and secular rulers, what would this judge say when he confronted men who’d uniformly let him down? Then suddenly he’s there and...wincing...they hear “*peace be with you.*” I know our lesson says it was Jesus who breathed the Holy Spirit upon them – but I can’t help but think there were a lot of men breathing a collective sigh of relief in the very same moment. Instead of a hard as nails Irish grandfather in walks a peacemaking grandma composed, serene and comforting – cleaning up the mess and calming the fears.

What does this resurrection story aim for, other than a “proof” that Jesus was seen alive? Well, once a long time earlier a man and a woman heard the sound of God in the garden – and Genesis 3:8 says; “*it was evening.*” And they were afraid – they tried to hide themselves and they had reason to. They had broken covenant with God, breaking with it the unity of heaven and earth. Peace with God was among that day’s casualties. Jesus knew that – as author Max Lucado wrote “*Jesus began to walk to his cross while the echoes of crunching fruit still reverberated in that Garden of Eden*”, and it was a story not lost on John his disciple either. In the evening humanity once faced its creator and shuttered at the prospect. If not for the resurrection of Jesus, you and I would still be shuttering today. But we’re not.

That has been removed – the evening Jesus walked into a room of equally fearful men and announced to them that the unity of heaven and earth had been restored. The break mended. That is what Jesus has done – and by faith in him you have or can know the same grace that let the air out of fear in an upper room by breathing peace. What then is our response? That evening you’d have expected Jesus to unroll a list of expectations for his followers. But he didn’t – and still doesn’t. When my grandma rescued me that day from the wrath of my grandpa I’d not only have washed that fridge till it sparkled, I’d have taken on their cluttered basement and mowed the lawn in a heartbeat! She told me to go have my pop in the living room and relax. That’s grace.

Jesus said this – do for one another what I’ve done for you – forgive. Jesus told his followers “*as the father has sent me I am sending you.*” John 3:16 – you know it...God so loved the world that he gave his only Son...it’s perhaps the most famous passage in the Bible. But how many of you know what John 3:17 says? “*For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.*” That’s how the Father “sent” Jesus, and Jesus sends you. Forgiven, you can forgive. United with God, you can unite. At peace with God, you can live peaceably. In “The Chronicles of Narnia”, author C.S. Lewis envisions John 20 in a scene in which Aslan, the resurrected Lion, visits petrified citizens of Narnia, frozen by the wrath of the White Witch, and frees them – how...by breathing on them.

Breathe deeply dear people – you are at peace with God. AMEN