

## Some Good News

*John 20:19-31*

*Living God, let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of all our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.*

Can you think of a time when you got need much-needed good news? Good news is strange, especially when you really need it. In times like these we're experiencing now, there is so much bad news—globally, nationally, locally, and personally. Bad news has a sinister nature that seems to stack up, build on itself, conflate until it all becomes one enormous bad news burden we all struggle to carry... and yet, somehow it leaves us feeling like we're carrying it alone. But good news in the midst of struggle has a way of entering our sadness, our burdens, and our fear like a breath of fresh air—a healing breath that allows us to set the burden down for a moment. The burden *is still there*, but with a breath of fresh air, it somehow feels a *little* more manageable.

We could all use some good news these days, right? Well, that was exactly the kind of thinking that inspired John Krazinski, the actor who formerly starred as Jim Halpert on the TV Show *The Office*, to launch a heartwarming series of videos called "[Some Good News](#)" from his own home in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. John set up at a makeshift news desk in his living room to tell the world about the good things happening in the midst of so much bad. He talks about the bravery of healthcare workers, teachers going the extra mile for students while still social distancing, and shares some laughs along the way. He even brings friends into the mix, interviewing *The Office* co-star Steve Carell. John and Boston Red Sox Legend David Ortiz surprised health care workers fighting the coronavirus pandemic in Boston, gifting them with Red Sox season tickets for *life*. John also made a young girl's day by not only planning to fly her out to New York to see *Hamilton* when it's safe to travel (because she missed her chance to see the show), but he also invited Lin-Manuel Miranda and the Original Cast of *Hamilton* to sing the title song over Zoom. John Krazinski's episodes of *Some Good News* are powerful and inspiring, because they are honest about the bad stuff, acknowledging that there's pain in the world, but in the midst of fear, sadness, and pain, he points us all back to what is good.

Like a fresh breath of air into these troubled times, *Some Good News* is just what everyone needs.

As Christians—followers of the resurrected Christ—we know the value of Good News. The word Gospel literally means "good news" and its the story of hope around which we build our lives. In today's Gospel, we hear one of my favorite stories from scripture, one that has been needlessly referred to as the story of "Doubting Thomas". I say needlessly, because I believe Thomas has gotten a bad wrap, and that the story is much more complex than just one man's unbelief. I'd prefer we call this the story of "Sad Thomas and the Fearful Disciples."

In this story, the disciples are locked in their meeting house together, fearful and sad. (Perhaps this lesson is too relevant these days!) Like those of us living through a global pandemic, the stresses of physical distancing, and the general climate of fear, Christ's disciples are in a similar situation. They are completely lost, nothing makes sense, and they don't know what is coming next. How can anything go

back to normal after they were followers of Jesus? *They had witnessed healings, seen him feed 5000, watched him walk on water, and even been commissioned to heal themselves!* How could their lives be normal after their own friend betrayed their master? *One of their own twelve, one whom they called brother had betrayed their beloved teacher and they watched their teacher be publicly crucified, and even still they watched from a distance having betrayed him each themselves.* How could their lives ever be safe when they may be recognized and killed as a follower of this self-proclaimed "Son of God"? *Peter wasn't the only one of the disciples terrified that he would be recognized, they had all been seen with Jesus, and the Jewish authorities and the might of Rome threatened to kill them too!* They were right to be scared. As for Thomas, I can't even begin to understand what grief compelled him to leave the safety of their locked room. His reaction later on points to one who was despondent, inconsolable, completely grief-stricken and utterly hopeless. *"Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."* Deep despair at the loss of the one he loved... Thomas was right to feel this way.

It's in these places of fearful isolation and deep despair that Jesus meets his disciples. He doesn't wait until they cheer up. Like a fresh breath of air into these troubled times, *Some Good News* walked calmly into their midst. Through their locked doors, through their fear, through their worry for whatever the future may hold, through their grief, Christ comes to them and says, "Peace be with you."

Christ's peace in this situation is a curious thing. Christ's peace changes nothing, and yet it changes everything. Think about it... The disciples already knew that Christ was risen. They had heard this from the mouths of the faithful women who were the first to find the tomb empty. And yet they hid in fear. Christ says "Peace be with you" but the threat of recognition and death still remained should they leave their home. Their pain at betrayal by a friend and horror at the crucifixion they had witnessed remained. And even after this scene they lock themselves away in fear again as we see the next week when Thomas is finally back with them. Christ speaking peace into that home did not change the circumstances of the bad news all around them, and yet it changed everything.

Then, our story tells us that "[Jesus] breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'" This Holy Spirit continues the work of Easter transformation and changes something within these fearful men. The disciples proclaimed to Thomas when he returned that they were witnesses to the Resurrection. And just like that their movement grew (even if it took another visit from Jesus for Thomas to really buy in). Christ's resurrection peace changed something in this group, and even if it may have been a slow start to leave the safety of their locked home, the disciples lives would never be the same again. They had received, like a breath of fresh air, the Spirit of the living, resurrected God. The Peace of Christ is not a magic trick... It's not a supernatural cure-all, or a get out of jail free card that just makes all bad things go away. This peace surpasses all understanding. It is a defiant hope that all things will be made new in the love of Christ, and that death, fear, despair, and betrayal will never have the last word.

And notices that Christ did not shame them for their fear. He didn't dismiss their grief as irrelevant in the light of resurrection. He didn't tell them that their feelings were invalid. Indeed, as Christ said, *"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."* What a joyous gift to have this faith. But

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sometimes... darnit all, we just need to see. And so Christ appears to the disciples twice, meeting them in their continued fear and grief. When we need a sign, when we need to see Christ's hope, when our fear and shame and guilt and grief cloud our vision of the heavenly hope to which we are called, Christ will meet us where we are again and again with his breath, his spirit, his peace.

Knowing that Christ is truly present with us in our homes, shut behind doors, or even as we make a dangerous journey out does nothing to change that COVID-19 is still deadly, and that we are right to take necessary precautions. Knowing that Christ is truly present with us in our lives as we worry for our livelihoods or wait in terror while loved ones battle deadly illnesses does not mean that our fear instantly goes away. Knowing that Christ is breathing peace into our lives, does not ease our shameful struggle as we recognize the ways we've failed to steward God's good creation and continue to poison and destroy this planet we've been give. Knowing that Christ is risen and that resurrection is the promised gift for all God's people, does not mean that our Muhlenberg community cannot mourn the death of our friend Zach Fletchall—a husband, father and friend who is gone far too soon.

Christ's peace does not dismiss our sadness, doubts, and fears, but acknowledges them. Christ's peace doesn't ignore our failures and sins, but it's big enough to hold them in grace. We need the story of the fearful disciples and a grieving Thomas' moment of doubt as we figure out how to live as Easter people, reconciling abundant and life-giving hope with the painful realities of our world. Like a breath of fresh air to our weary souls, we need *Some Good News*.

Christ's peace acknowledges our pain, but it doesn't leave us there. The Gospel of Jesus Christ, the hope of Easter is and always will be about transformation. Christ's peace is making all things new. Christ's peace is the good news in the midst of the bad news. Christ's peace is inviting us daily to take a deep breath and set out on a new way of justice and compassion for our neighbors, ourselves, and the earth we've been entrusted to steward. Christ's peace comes to us again and again, in good times and bad, "so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name."

Our neighbors, our environment, our world, and our selves are all in desperate need of some good news right now. And yes, we may rightly be wary of one who comes into our lives, breathing on us, in the midst of this season of pandemic. But Christ is with us, wherever we are, breathing new life and hope in the midst of doubt and sadness. It may take *time*, but the Easter story is wide enough to hold all our joys and sorrows. I pray today that the God of peace, who brought again from the grave our Lord Jesus Christ, may meet you in the the locked rooms of fear and sadness that you find in your lives today. I pray that in this peace you find a **love** deeper than the depths of despair, and higher than the heights of joy. I pray you receive new eyes to see the Good News around you, and receive grace to bear the Bad News with an abiding trust in the one who breathes new and eternal life. Because, like a fresh breath of air into these troubled times, *Some Good News* is just what we need.

Amen.