

Peace Be Unto You

by Art Katz

Art Katz explores the profound implications of Jesus' resurrection and the peace He offers to His fearful disciples.

Duration: 2:09:57

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, John 20:19, John 20:21-23

Topics: "Peace"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of preaching the word of God and the faith required to do so. He highlights the commission given to the disciples by Jesus and the violent deaths they all suffered, except for John. The speaker suggests that the gospel should threaten the status quo and challenge the world, but often it has been watered down and turned into religious pap. He urges listeners to fully appropriate the assurance and peace that Jesus offers and to understand the true meaning of the gospel in order to be prepared for the challenges that may come.

Transcript

This will be a kind of like preliminary first experience for us, getting our feet wet in examining a text. And I have to say that for myself, probably the most positive benefit of that seminary experience was the discipline of being required to remain within a text, and that it made me realize that up until that time I had conducted myself with a certain kind of charismatic and prophetic liberty, finding a scripture here and there to make my point. But something happens of a very remarkable kind when you confine yourself within a text itself and don't go necessarily outside of it to make your point, and let the Lord speak to us from that text.

It's an intensive burrowing in, and it's really amazing the riches that are to be found in a few verses. So here's an episode at the conclusion of the Gospel of John where Jesus reveals himself in his resurrection but not yet ascended form to the disciples who are yet full of fear and have not yet sorted out the meaning of the death of the Lord. And I don't think that the full implication of his resurrection has yet struck them.

And in the same breath I would say I don't think it's yet struck us, and that there's no limit to what the meaning and implication of the resurrection of Jesus means, and that we have all been knocking about on four cylinders rather than six for the want of a deeper appropriation of the meaning of the resurrection of Jesus. So maybe the Lord will open something to us here as we read. So from verse 19, then the same evening being the first day of the week when the doors were shut, where the disciples were assembled for

fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.

And when he had so said, he showed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord. Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you.

As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whosoever sins you remit, they are remitted unto them, and whosoever sins you retain, they are retained.

But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.

And after eight days again his disciples were within and Thomas with them. Then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger and behold my hands, reach hither thy hand and thrust it into my side, and be not faithless but believing.

And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me thou hast believed, blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed, and many other signs truly that Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book, but these are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you might have life through his name. Amen.

Well, I'm just inviting you to leap in and to intensively examine this text. And just to give you a little teaser, in verse 26, And after eight days again his disciples were within and Thomas with them. Then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst and said, Peace be unto you.

So just to raise a question, why do you think it is that eight days later, eight is the resurrection number, Jesus making a second appearance, having already revealed himself in his resurrection body to his disciples, that the doors would still be shut? How do you account for a fear seeing that the Lord has already appeared in his resurrection body, which is the testimony of the triumph of the cross, that all authority has been given unto him in heaven and earth, and yet eight days later they still need an affirmation or a strengthening of their faith? Well, what do you think that the phrase, Peace be unto you, means? Do you think that that's just a little courtesy, a little courtesy, a little polite rhetorical flourish, a little Yiddish kite? Or is Jesus saying something with Peace be unto you to terrified disciples that we need to understand? Because we also are going to experience terror and fright and last day's extremity and persecution of a kindred kind. So everything that we will be examining in these days is not just merely historical, well, how did they respond and what were the issues that they faced, but what's the application for us in the issues that we will face? And how secure a grasp do we have of the things pertaining to the resurrection that will constitute our peace and our assurance? Do you understand what I'm saying? Okay, so let's go back a little over this. Every time Jesus appears to them, the first thing he says is, Peace be unto you.

Now we can either see that as just a conventional Jewish greeting or something more. Who here sees that as something more, knowing that there's not a syllable in this text or in any of the Scriptures that is in any way happenstance? There's nothing here that's mere courtesy or conventional. Every single syllable is

charged with enormous divine content and meaning, including the amenity of what seems to be just a little gracious greeting, Peace be unto you.

If that's more than just a little gracious meaning, what is its meaning? And why does Jesus repeat it twice? And why are they afraid? And why are they behind closed doors? And to what degree are we behind closed doors? You know, in a spiritual sense, not fully coming into the assurance and confidence that we need to be sent ones on the basis of his resurrection and his authority. I always appreciate great questions more than I do correct answers. So I'm just operating here to show you and encourage you to theological reflection, which is to say the raising of good questions over a text.

If we can raise the right questions, the answers will come. And so we just have to acknowledge that we have been slothful ourselves, mentally and spiritually lazy, and have done what I had done over the years, just employ a verse here and there to make a point. But this exercise in discipline of getting into a text and burrowing in it and getting from it its meaning and its present and future application is really the choice work of godly students.

And we will be enlarged thereby. Okay, that word shalom is, just like every other Hebrew word, infinitely rich. And I'm not going to give it to you.

No, I don't know that I can. But I think it's the kind of thing that we need to explore. After all, this is actually the first resurrection word that Jesus is speaking to his disciples.

And of all of the words that he could have employed or chosen, he chose this. So here too, haven't we made that word shalom a kind of an anemic casual expression? Anybody, like we say, bless you, brother, and shalom. And part of our function, who are jealous for apostolic and prophetic foundations, is to restore the integrity of language itself.

So it's a good thing to ask, what does that word really mean? And why did Jesus choose to employ it? And maybe we'll not understand that until we spend a few minutes examining why it is that they are afraid. Why are they behind closed doors? And if we don't understand their terror and their fear, a lot of this will be lost to us. I wonder if there's a kind of relapse, an effect that follows great events, that even the most heroic of God's servants feel a wave of fear that comes over them.

I don't know if any of you have. Of course, you've not experienced great events. That's your problem.

But maybe there is something that we need to sense because we are being called to great events. And that maybe we can suspect that on the very heels of it comes a remarkable negative reaction where the enemy comes in like a flood and plays upon your weakness, your doubting, your uncertainty. Maybe though Doubting Thomas was the first actually to articulate, I will not believe, to what degree and depth did the others believe, even in the seeing of the resurrected Christ? Because in another text it says, they did not yet believe unto joy.

And the fact that they would yet be behind closed doors eight days later seems to suggest that their belief is not all that it should be. Because if they had a supreme confidence in the resurrected Lord, why are they yet cowering in fear? O ye of little faith, why are you afraid? Fear is always the antithesis of faith. Now when Jesus is saying, Peace be unto you, is he making a suggestion or is he declaring an event? When Jesus says, Peace be unto you, he's not encouraging you to consider something in your mind.

He is establishing your peace by his word. That's what we need to recognize. Because the day will come when we will need to establish things by our word.

So the whole faith in the power of the word and the proclamation of the word needs to be ours. So this is not just a little casual greeting. This is an event.

The speaking is itself an event because Jesus appreciates and understands the magnitude of their fear. And I want to read to you what I've written here from my paper about that fear. It is appropriate then to find the disciples behind locked doors in fear, not yet surmising the meaning of the empty tomb.

That they were assembled for fear of the Jews, in verse 19, is perhaps a deeper intimation beyond the levels of human consciousness of the ultimate earthly power expressed through religious and secular means that had just devastatingly brought to death their master and their lord. Now I know that when you read something, you have to fight for the meaning of it. But this is picking up with what Jim touched.

The same kind of fear that Elijah experienced because what brought Jesus to death was the operation of the powers of darkness expressed through the ultimate religious form of Judaism at that time in concert with the ultimate political form of Roman rule. And I don't think we appreciate this. Jesus was the victim of the powers of darkness in their ultimate configuration.

And these disciples witnessed both his apprehension, his suffering, and his death. They saw the fury of hell poured out on their teacher and coming through the Jewish community principally, and I hope I'm not encouraging anybody's anti-Semitism, but I think that it resides there or has opportunity there beyond anything that we presently recognize. There's something about that configuration of things in Jewish religious mentality that was expressed by that high priest that it was necessary that one man die for the nation lest we lose our place.

We need to get a sense of this. What the crucifixion of death of Jesus registered upon their souls, what they witnessed, it was terrifying because all of them had said, though all the world deny you, yet will we deny you never. And yet when the night of terror came, when Jesus was apprehended and the fact of it struck, they all fled and they all betrayed him, and some, like Peter, shamefully.

So if we're going to appreciate the statement, peace be unto you, and the confidence that Jesus is wanting to impart in the demonstration of himself as resurrected, and now I send you as the Father has sent me, we need to begin with a clearer sense of what their fear is, that eight days later they're still behind closed doors. It's a fear that nobody in this room has ever yet experienced, and some of us in this room will. Now what is the anatomy of that fear? It's the depth of depths.

It's the enemy poured out, bearing his fangs. It's seeing how ruthless and how devastating he can be as he ventilated all that is intrinsic to his darkness upon Jesus and left him shredded, marred more than any man, none of us can imagine what Jesus looked like in his death. And one way that we can begin to sense it is the two on the road to Emmaus who were so disconsolate, so dejected, so broken, because they had seen him hang in that pitiful condition, that every last hope they had was shredded equally with their shredded blood.

So how many of us have ever faced the Jewish community head on? How many of us have ever seen behind the facade of politeness and civility and moral and ethical value that the Jewish community endorses something of the antagonism against God that has opportunity there? Maybe we'll get to this in

another way at some other time, but I believe this has everything to do with the historic failure of the church to go to the Jew first and also to the Greek. The church has missed the priority of God because it intuitively recognizes just how monumental a threat and how formidable a presence the Jewish thing is. They were behind closed doors for the fear of the Jews.

And one of my experiences was speaking at Vassar College in upstate New York and spending the day there, and as I passed one of the Jewish students, a number of Jews frequent that place, this young fellow looked up at me and said, you'll get yours tonight. I thought, what does that mean? But it wasn't long that I found out that that night, as I was preaching on Abraham and circumcision, the doors burst open and in came about a dozen black, fedora-hatted, bearded, Orthodox Hasidim. I'll tell you that the mafia would look like boy scouts next to the terror that came into that room.

And these guys burst in, and not one sat. They placed themselves strategically around the room, and I never watched a congregation of Christians go berserk as I saw them that night. It was like lifting the lid off a garbage can.

You can't imagine what came out. Fear, anger, resentment. But before that, if I had said, how many of you here love the Jewish people, every hand would have gone up.

But when the Jewish people came in, in the depth of their religious antagonism to God and truth, everything changed. We were taken by surprise. And what we reveal when we're taken by surprise is what we, in fact, are.

And one of these guys stood about the distance from me as flora, peering at me with burning eyes like I was Hitler himself, and then they began to take over. And how dare I come with a King James Bible in my ignorance? And da-da-da-da-da. It was just an evening never to be forgotten.

I think I would, in terms of stark terror, I would say that that night exceeded the occasion at Jack, what's his name's church in Los Angeles? Hayford. When the doors burst open again, and a band of Jewish radicals, like the JDL, came walking down each aisle toward me, and the guy that was walking down the center aisle had a knit cap and something under it, which I thought surely was a vial of acid, to be thrown in my face. And I was preaching on Acts 16 and the apostolic encounter, and it was happening.

Everyone stopped breathing. And what saved the day was that a brother whom I had just recently baptized, a new convert, a Hollywood writer, too young in the Lord to know better, he's about 6'4 or 6'5, got out of his seat, and he grabbed this guy by the scruff of the neck and by the seat of his pants and just hoisted him right out of the room. And I didn't object.

These are little, what shall I say, pre-last days foreshadowings of the kinds of abrupt confrontations that are going to take place, particularly in God's last days dealing with the Jewish people, who are already so hyper and so sensitive and so defensive of their Jewishness in their insecurity that anything mediated toward them, however well-meaning, has got to be misunderstood and be misconstrued by them as threat. We need to know that. It's not going to be apparent to them that we have hearts full of love and desire, their redemptive recognition of the Lord.

To them we represent a threat that is contrary to the thing they want most to preserve, namely their slight sense of Jewishness that is being attacked from every angle, even the angle of intermarriage that is already now like 65% of all American Jewish marriages. So we're a threat. And there's something here

that is not to be found in any ethnic group.

This is not your ordinary resistance to the Gospel. There's something here of an additional kind that is at the heart of the powers of darkness of this present world that has employed my people unhappily throughout their whole apostasy to be the agents, even unwittingly, of these powers to bring about schemes and devices contrary to God's intention, like Marxism and all other kinds of things in which we Jews have been so expert. Have you noticed that the Lord does not encourage us to try it out in the sticks first and then if it works there you bring it into the big city and put it up on Broadway? He says, begin at Jerusalem where I was crucified, where the prophets were stoned.

Then you can go to Samaria and the uttermost corners of the earth. Don't begin where it's easiest. Begin where it's hardest.

Like right from the beginning, head on, meet the issue. Don't delay. Face it in the authority that is mine by virtue of my obedience to the Father unto death and resurrection.

All authority is given unto me. Now that's what he says, but when he's not visibly present, can you still believe that and face the outraged Jewish community that has just crucified him and will crucify others who continue in the same truth that he exemplified? I think that what we're missing is a sense of the scandal of the gospel, the terrible offense of the gospel, as it is most revealed when it comes into confrontation with everything that men celebrate as wisdom, as righteousness, as religion, as morality, as ethics, as culture, which we Jews have developed and propounded to the farthest state. The point of greatest antagonism in conflict is where the foolishness and the scandal of the gospel meets the wisdom of the world head on, and that's represented by the Jewish community that has just crucified that wisdom.

And now these who were the observers of that terror, the ferocity of it, the unveiled bestiality are now going to have to go into the same place and continue the work that he began, the same messianic task. As the Father has sent me, so send I you. I can just hear them saying, great, what else is new? You pick up where I left off.

You continue in the thing that eventuated in my crucifixion. And of course, what do we know? That not one of these men survived. And with the exception of John, to die a natural death, every single one of them suffered a violent death.

And if this is the commencement of the gospel dispensation, the beginning of it, the sending by the resurrected one, what will be its conclusion in the last days? And don't we again need, therefore, to fully appropriate the assurance and the peace that Jesus gave, or it has yet not stumbled on the antagonism that the gospel is to the world. And maybe part of the reason is because our gospel is not that gospel. It's not the gospel of the kingdom.

It does not threaten the status quo. It does not unseat the security and the whole mindset and way of life of people who consider and receive it by making a decision. But maybe when it becomes this gospel again, to radically overturn everything to which a person has given himself, then we're going to know the reaction of violence against us.

So this is good to begin to borrow in and understand what's represented in just these few verses. Let me finish this statement here. I'll read it again.

It is appropriate then to find the disciples behind locked doors in fear, not yet surmising the meaning of the empty tomb. That they were assembled for fear of the Jews, quote and unquote, is perhaps a deeper intimation beyond the levels of human consciousness of the ultimate earthly power expressed through religious and secular means that had just devastatingly brought to death their master and their lord. All that stands for authority and power of the present age, politically and religiously, had triumphed.

Its visibility and impressiveness, having all the marbles, so to speak, continues. It is indeed something to be feared, for the powers of hell are resident in it, and the church that fails still to see this cannot itself appropriate in full the resurrection mandate or power and must, as time itself I think has corroborated, turn Easter into a chocolate bunny's spring event. Let me go over that last piece there.

If we don't understand the reason for their fear, we'll not be able to appropriate the reason for their confidence and their peace. And we will turn the resurrection event into a kind of cultural celebration, which it has become. This resurrection, you see, we're missing it at every point.

We don't know as we ought to know. We don't understand and know God as we ought. The gospel is a parody of what it was at the first and needs again to become.

The resurrection has only become a doctrine to which we subscribe as being correct. The world has denigrated it and made it only a kind of Easter, Sunday, chocolate bunny, egg-rolling thing. That's why we need to go back to the first.

We need to go back to the beginning and dig out this event here that's being described. It's been lost, and so it will not have the meaning for us that we need unless we can begin to assess the fear. We haven't even begun to look at, and Jesus breathed the Spirit upon them, receiving the Holy Spirit.

What would you rather receive, the continuing physical and visible presence of the Lord or the Spirit that is given because he's going to be absent from us? And on the basis of what he has breathed and on the basis of the way he has spoken, will that be sufficient for you to establish you in what the shalom of God is, which is not just a Shabbat night greeting, but shalom in the moment when the doors burst open and the chassidim come in. That's when you test whether you're in the shalom of God. Anybody can have it when the candles are burning and we're having a little Yiddish kite and a nice evening.

But the issue of our peace is in the midst of threat, in the midst of terror, will we then be at peace because the Lord had said so and because he has breathed his Spirit into us? This is the way the whole gospel dispensation begins, and this is the way, therefore, it is going to end. It's always true that as also in the beginning, so also in the end, and that's why we need to get this beginning into our own spirits, even to the place where it becomes for us a place of true beginning, so that wherever we are spiritually behind closed doors, fearful, threatened, intimidated, subscribing to correct doctrines about resurrection and even speaking the word shalom, yet failing for the reality of it, we need to come through into something on the basis of this text. These things are written that you might believe.

Verse 31, now how come that's there? Exactly for this, that you, who's the you? The Lord anticipating the generations of believers that will follow, even us now in this moment. These things are written that you might believe. That Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you might have life through his name.

That word life, what synonym would you put there for life? What is implied in life? That you have physical and biological continuation? What's the life? The life is what you exhibit when the Hasidim are as close to you as flora and are spitting in your face and calling you every name in the book, and your mind goes blank and you can't think of a clever thing to say to rebuke them. What comes forth then has got to be the life of the Lord. How come, Art? Because it's not your reputation that's riding in that moment, it's the eternal issue of their salvation, who have come to harass, to mock, and to destroy.

Nevertheless, they're coming head to head with a piece of the resurrected Christ in us. And what he will say and exhibit in the power of that life may have a depth of penetration that only eternity will reveal. You know, I'm a man of very poor memory, but here's one thing I remember about that night.

As this guy who was closest to me was railing, at one point he said, And we know that you love us, cats, but... And then he went on to say something else, but I didn't hear the rest of it. I thought to myself, I never told you that. How do you know that? And I don't know where he got that.

We had never met before. I don't know whether it's by reputation or something communicated. I don't know.

But that you might have life by believing in his name. Let me just take a moment's breath right here. Do you realize that every single thing that we have been considering so far stands perilously in danger of becoming religion? His name can become a formula.

Resurrection can become a mindless doctrine to which we give assent. Shalom could become a cutesy little benediction. Everything that is charged here with such replete meaning as end-time provision for us can, if we miss it by ever so little, become transmuted into religion so that in his name becomes a formula that if you rub the genie lamp in the name of Jesus, something comes out.

We have got to contend for the faith, saints, once and for all, given the saints. And that's what we are presently doing and will do in all these days. We are starting easy.

This is a light exercise. Nevertheless, it contains all of the elements that will be with us in every time we sit down together to consider the things of God. We need to realize that the world, the flesh, and the devil has a remarkable facility to transmute the holy things of God and turn them into religious pap.

So we have got to fight and go back in and get the original meaning and make it our own. Or we are goners when the doors burst open and the unexpected thing comes for which we are not fitted because we do not believe in the peace of God. We do not believe in the name of God and have not appropriated the things that are made available through his resurrection.

Are you following me? That's why we're probing here. Nothing is more viciously opposed to the faith than religion. And that's what terrified Elijah and terrifies them.

When religion is threatened, and we're going to hopefully get into this, what is religion? And why is it inimical to God? One of the greatest ironies and paradox that that which purports to be about God is most opposed to God and opposed violently and ruthlessly. You need to understand that and to recognize what religion is. So whether it comes from Jews... Let me say this.

What we're calling Jewish is probably also Protestant, denominational, Catholic. All of the intrinsic elements that made up the Judaism that crucified Christ is yet to be found in all normative and

conventional religious bodies today. And that though we are presently in a quiescent mood where they are not expressing an antagonism to the apostolic faith, it will not long remain that.

When the faith that is true begins to confront them, you can expect there will be the mask off and the fangs bared and the same hostility again revealed. So we're preparing ourselves for a soon coming eventuality. That's a good point.

When we say Jewish, we're getting at something much deeper, and it's to be found in every religious and institutional thing that is opposed to true faith. You might just make a little note for yourself and reflect on this and maybe write up a couple paragraphs. What is the nature of religion? And why is it antagonistic to God to the point of crucifying with devastating brutality the God whom it presumes to celebrate? This is not an option.

This is a requirement. Unless you understand this, the whole last days will be a mystery to you, and you'll be unfitted not only to serve in the last days but to stand because one of the most vital aspects will be a last days confrontation between religious and political system, Jezebel and Ahab, versus the Elijah band, the true prophetic faith. So we need to understand what is there about the nature of religion? By its very nature, that makes it so intrinsically opposed to God, even in the name of God.

And if we had time and we had ability to begin to describe the horrendous assault on the sons and daughters of God through history, the blood would rise to the ceilings. The roll call of martyrs, of tortured victims. It's not just people put to death.

Put to death with spite, with maliciousness, with delight in seeing them suffer. There's something in the spirit of religion that is so inimical to God and to God's people that we need to understand, which had just been abruptly demonstrated to these disciples when they saw it visited upon Jesus. We need to understand their fear.

Let's look into the text. Is he pushing them out from behind closed doors? Where does it show us that? And A for the day for the first one who spots it. Peace be to you as the Father has sent me, I also send you.

Okay, verse 21. This isn't Jesus coming to give them a little pat on the back. This is Jesus coming to send.

So sending, receiving the Holy Spirit, the word of peace, everything is set in these few verses. Let's dwell on that for a bit. As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.

Why didn't he just say, I'm sending you? Why does he even have to refer to as my Father hath sent me? What purpose does that serve? If every word is of God, what purpose does that word serve? Good. So the sending is not a kind of a technical ministerial thing, but something that comes out of relationship. And if the relationship is not there, you're not being sent as he was sent, nor will you have a comparable result as the Father hath sent me, so send I you.

So the sending comes out of a relationship with the Father, with a knowledge of God, or that sending is vain. And what question rises in your mind like, if that's true, Art, then what can we say about the preponderance of religious things that the Church has been doing historically since that time, and now even today? How much of our acts and religious activity is out of a sending derived from relationship with the Father? And how many of us would not presume to go until that relationship is sure? I don't think that by these few questions we're exhausting what is implied as my Father hath sent me, so send I you. It's in

the same character.

It's in keeping with his same purpose. It will be in the same power. It comes out of the same relationship.

You're going to be a continuum of what I have expressed till now. No small thing to men who are terrified and sitting behind locked doors. And the whole destiny and future of the Gospel endeavor rests on their ability to do it.

For there's no continuation and no future. How do you like them apples? The faith of God. In fact, we can even make a little collection of the last comments of these men.

Though the world deny you, we deny you never. And later on even Peter saying, what shall this man do? And there's still a competition, a striving, a jealousy. I mean, God is taking some really crude material and charging them with the same commission that he himself had.

Talk about the faith of God. Has anything changed since that time? Has the Lord revised his strategy? Is there any work that can be considered God's work today that is significant and messianic apostolic that can be performed outside of this context? Maybe just to take a moment and talk about how ministerially minded we are, particularly as Westerners and as Americans. Very little thought about relationship, but everything about doing and having a ministry and what are you doing and what are you performing.

It's not the emphasis of the Lord at all. We need to be restored to something that relationship precedes service and relationship of a very particular kind, of the kind that the son had with the father. I'll tell you that might call for like a moratorium on all present activity for a considerable time to let a relationship be established.

And in fact, what has most threatened that kind of relationship but the activity itself. In fact, the activity probably stands as a substitute for the relationship because it's tougher to be than it is to do. God's doing always comes out of being.

Be not afraid. Peace be unto you. The emphasis is on being.

Who can figure out why verse 23 is included in this text at all? How did that get in there? What does that got to do with what we're talking about? It doesn't seem to be like a detour. Why would sin now come into the discussion? And that those to whom he's speaking and breathing his spirit will have an authority to remit or to retain sins. Whose sins do you think is being referred to here? Is it the world? Is it the unbelieving world? Is it the hostile Jews for whom they're afraid? It may have more to do with their own sins than it has to do with the sins outside of them.

And why would that be expressed now? Right after, as my father hath sent me, so send I you. Can you have a relationship with the Father that would qualify for ascending and have inadequate relationship with your brothers? No way. So if they're going to take this formula for sending seriously of a relationship with the Father, what is the implication of their relationship with themselves who were jealous, divisive, competitive, calling down fire from heaven? What shall this man do? Something is not being stated but it's being implied.

That if you're going to get this right before you're sent, sin is going to surface and I'm giving you an authority to deal with it. I think that the key point is that if relationship is the key to sending with the Father, then there's an implication of relationship with the brothers. And if that's going to be made right, sin is

going to surface and have to be dealt with.

In fact, who can cite a text that shows that the first apostolic sending clearly is an expression of a body that had come to a place beyond its sins against itself. They had come to a place of authentic relationship and then the Lord said, Okay, now separate unto me. Where is that found? In Acts 13.

When they were found ministering unto the Lord together, the Holy Ghost said, Separate unto me. Paul and Barnabas sort of went to a call. When the Lord saw that the truth of their relationship was reflected in the truth of their worship, then the sending was made possible.

Why is this thing about sin preceded by receiving the Holy Ghost? And your answer to that, or your inability to answer that, is the statement of your own inadequate relationship in the body. Your lack of the knowledge of church as community will be reflected right now in your inability to understand the connection between receiving the Holy Ghost and those whose sins you remit, remitted those who retain. Is this Holy Ghost a power for serving, do you think? Or is it a power for something else? There's nothing more grueling and more demanding and more exhausting than true relationship in the body of Christ.

That's the way I would express it. And there's no way that you're going to perform that out of your own well-meaning intention and nice guy-ism and strength. You'll be exhausted in the first week.

We need a power just to be to each other what we must before we can be it in the world. You got that in your notes? That's the statement for today. And that's the conjunction that I see between Jesus breathing His Spirit upon them and then saying, now remit sins.

What is that, some kind of light bookkeeping? Anyone who has ever had to deal with sin in the body knows how exhausting and draining those questions are. And the reason that we don't know them is that we are not in that kind of context. Our Sunday Christianity does not provide an occasion for dealing with sin, with judging, with retaining or remanding.

We're passive. We're sitting in pews. We're listening to a biblical sermon.

We're singing choruses. We're taking a collection and we leave. That's why there's no apostolic sending, saints.

What is the Lord doing? Drawing our attention to the foundation. We've been so ministerially minded wanting to do and go and blah blah blah in all our cheap immature condition. And God is saying, before you go anywhere, before you think to do anything for me, if your sending is going to be like my sending, and be as fruitful as mine was, you need first to attend to this.

And you'll not be able to do it except by the power that I will give you. It's interesting that the denominations that have most refuted the necessity for this power of the spirit are those whose religious formulas are most predictable. Where there's no requirement made on the passive congregation at all.

Everything is off the elevated platform by men who have been credentialed and who perform and exercise all the needful things. But we're coming back to the things as they were in the beginning. How was it originally? From square one, Jesus crucified, now resurrected.

And now coming and making his first presentation of himself to his own disciples, terrified with fear, who have yet a mandate and a calling for which their three year walk with the Lord is not yet sufficient

preparation. And even this breathing of the Holy Spirit is that the full and final provision. There's still a Pentecost ahead of which this is the intimation.

In fact, I would think that this breathing of the Spirit is more for us than it was for them. Namely, to show us the conjunction between the power necessary for true relationship that precedes sending than what they in fact actually received. If they received then all that they needed, Pentecost would not have been necessary for them.

So the Lord just gave an intimation, a faint installment, to show the order. I'll tell you, if this morning is doing nothing more for us than this, it's worth it. Namely, showing there's not a verse in the Scripture that is out of place.

There's a divine logic set one upon the other. If we could but see the unfolding of it, of why it is inserted as it is and in that order. I'll tell you what, this might change the whole way in which we see the Scripture.

And I want to go on record as saying that I have been guilty for years before my seminary experience of reading the Scriptures hurriedly, shallowly, and quickly. I did not invest myself in the Word. I read it like a narrative.

Oh, he said this, then he walked and he said that, and they said, and then him, then Thomas, and okay, next chapter. So we need to have our minds, what's the word, restored our mindset of what our approach to this Scripture is. This is a tangential thing, but we're seeing it from the beginning.

We have been much too casual about the Word of God, much too facile, much too quick. We have not brooded over the text, over the verses. What does this mean? Why is he saying that? Of all the things that could be said, why does he say that? Why are they in that situation behind locked doors? Why does he have to come again? Why this reference to sin? Why the... So, this is a first day's beginning to get our mindsets rightly aligned, so that from henceforth, whatever we examine, we're going to examine it as serious students of the Word who will not allow a single syllable to slip, pondering, weighing, examining, probing.

How does this relate to this, relating Scripture to Scripture? And I think it's going to become another kind of book for us. How explicitly does sin affect relationship adversely? What does loving the brother have to do with sin? As if the failure to love a brother is the statement of sin. Who can explain that? I think that's true.

Why? Because his love is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. And what grieves and makes the Spirit to recoil? The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of holiness, but sin. So, sin requiring the Spirit to recoil takes with him the love that he would otherwise shed abroad in the heart.

And so one of the things that we see is a loveless saint toward the brethren is really the statement of his sin. So that's an answer to my question. How does sin affect relationship? The Lord is, in very few words, what shall I say, He's laying the foundations for the church.

He's showing no relationship with the Father, except yourselves also equally and rightly related. The horizontal bar of the cross with the vertical. And there'll be no horizontal relationship except to be in truth and in righteousness, which sin will adversely affect.

And if you're going to face the issues of sin and judgment and discipline and chastising of brothers, of judging sin, of assessing it, you're going to need my power. All of this is implied in being sent as I have

been sent. Well, let's stop there and take a break.

And I'll leave you with one question as you take your break. How can this, in fact, be actually fulfilled in the last days except that we again be back into a context of relationship where we would know each other so well and be in an atmosphere of conducive love and righteousness that we can address the issues of sin and character that there might be ascending? Doesn't this require not just an adjustment of our minds but the adjustment of our whole church structure if indeed there's going to be ascending as I send you? And if there is no such sending, what is the consequence for the nations? What ministry, in fact, are they receiving? What eternal things are really being propounded and affected? Because those whom God sends turn the world upside down. Those whom he sends bear his word and to them he gives the spirit without measure.

So we need to have a revival of apostolic desire willing for the sacrifice that will make it again a possibility and a reality. And that's what this school is about. And that's why it itself has been born and is continuing in a community setting where those realities have their expression.

So this is going to cost something to forsake conventional church structures in which we have been enabled to live safely without being found out because we're not in the intensity of relationship by which it would be and it's not required of us so long as we're physically present for services. See what I mean? If we're going to be earnest about this there's going to be cost. But until it comes, what can we hope for in the last days and in the world? Because we're going to face intimidation through the factors that are coming in these last days that will be visible and external.

You know what faith is? A confidence resting on something invisible in the face of something threatening and visible. Right? What is faith? A definition. It's the contest between a confidence resting on that which is invisible in the face of that which is visible.

Namely, threat, intimidation. The powers of this world have all of the models that we're confronted by the things that are visible and they are formidable. Formidab.

Just the sight of them, the accoutrements of civilization against our little, puny, ridiculous, foolish, vain faith is the whole issue of what we are about. So, Jesus standing in the midst of them in that situation said, Peace be unto you. It's something like the Mount of Transfiguration where Jesus appears with Moses and Elijah and Peter and John and who was the other one went down on their faces.

James went down on their faces and Jesus touched them and said, Be not afraid. See, we read those things as if it's a suggestion. We don't read those things as if they are creative proclamations that create being unafraid.

Be not afraid. Something is going to come into your being contrary to fear by virtue of my word. Now, if the Lord were to say to us this morning, Be not afraid.

No matter what the future holds, no matter what uncertainty, no matter what confrontation with things formidable and visible, in that moment, be not afraid. Will you be it? Will your being receive and reflect the creative word of God sufficient to nullify fear and being incapacitated when you see the things that are visible? That's how extraordinarily important that statement of Jesus was to them when he stood in the midst of them. And everything is not only for them but for us also upon whom the ends of the age have come.

In a word, can we live by the word of God? That no matter what we see, no matter what faces us, the Lord has said, Be not afraid. Peace be with you. Maybe we need to come back to Bobby's question.

Well, what is shalom? Is it a kind of psychological smooth thing where something is glossed over and a little waving of a magical wand that you feel better? Is peace so shallow a thing with God? The shalom of God, is that all that it is? Peace. I mean, it's the very antithesis for which the world is dying, for the want of this shalom. It's not a superficial brushing over.

It's something deep coming into a man in the vital places where he lives, where fear is, the existential place. I don't have a word to describe it. No matter how formidable we ourselves are or whatever our experience or strength in the depths of us, there's a fluttering, weak piece of humanity and that's where God speaks His word.

Here's what I wrote. Jesus came and stood in front of them in the way that we've read. Are we not to understand that just as in the Mount of Transfiguration event, we are to see no man, not to be intimidated by the visible and external factors, but to see Jesus only, to see Him not only as resurrected, but to receive from Him in the authority conferred by the word that actually creates our peace, no matter how formidable and challenging our circumstances.

Should I say that again or is it on tape? No matter how formidable and challenging our circumstances, to have a faith that receives from Him the creative word that establishes our peace. The last days are charged with great uncertainty. There's a question.

We don't know what form it will take. How will it express itself? What things will break upon us with suddenness? But in view of all that, God has spoken. Peace be unto you.

My peace I give unto you. Let's look in John 16. Maybe we'll catch something of that.

16.33. These things I have spoken unto you, that in me you might have peace. In the world you shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world. So everything rests on the spoken word.

And if we cannot receive the value of the spoken word that constitutes for us an event, how shall we ourselves speak a word that will constitute for others an event? For as your faith is, so be it unto you. And anyone here who has heard my Ezekiel 37 message knows that everything in the last analysis is predicated upon the ability of a last days church to speak a word to Israel, then in its grave, that will raise it from its death. An ultimate prophetic word that comes not as suggestion, but as event.

Come forth. And our ability to speak it is the reflection of our ability first to receive it. Because if we cannot believe that word from God for us, how shall we believe that word for others through us? So there needs to be an elevation, an escalation of our whole appreciation of the word of God, not for instruction, however precious that is, or even inspiration, but as event.

And I can say from my own little experience that more and more now as I'm speaking, I'm seeing that, and even announcing that, that what you're hearing from me is not intended for your instruction, it's intended for your event. Before you heard, you were something else. Now that you've heard, you're this.

That the word itself is a creative event. And that's the first activity of the resurrected Christ to his disciples. And it has got to be for us, again, the last.

Because we're going to face things that will terrify. But may that word resound in our hearing, echo in our spirits. The Lord has said, peace be unto you, I'm not going to be deflected by what I'm seeing, I don't give a rap for the uncertainty of the things I can't know for the future, I don't care how terrifying the present confrontation is.

The Lord has said, peace. And therefore, in the shalom of God, I will now believe in everything that his name confers as life and answer that situation. Because if we act in fear, we are no longer in faith.

And what issues from us, therefore, is valueless. We just need to be reminded that the economy of God, the way of God, is so contrary to the flesh. God is predicating everything on the word that he speaks.

We're not accustomed to giving credence to words to that degree. If you notice the text, when he showed them his wounds, it says, then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord. Verse 20, the last part of verse 20 of John 20.

It doesn't say they were glad when they heard the Lord, they were glad when they saw the Lord. They were more comforted by a physical and visible reassurance than the word that was spoken. And that's how the world attenuates us.

We're comforted by the things that we can touch, feel, see. I'm secure because I've got this bank account or this brother or this, you know. But to predicate everything upon a word, see how radical a thing is required of us, a real revolution in our whole perception of what reality is.

This is reality. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my word will endure forever. So I think the answer to your question is, we've not believed.

And our fear betrays us, our fear reveals it. God has spoken, but we have cast the word away. We've not taken it as a creative word, maybe a suggestion.

And isn't that the way that we speak also? We speak by suggestion and not by conviction. We don't expect others to receive our word as being absolute. It's tentative, it's, you know, kind of a suggestion.

And therefore we project upon God the same low value that we assess to our own speaking and that of others. In fact, I have said many times, what you do with this message, having spoken to a congregation, is critical not only for your future but for your eternal future, whether you will see it and receive it as a message or as the word of God as event. How do you choose to hear it? Do you want to receive it as a suggestion or will you receive it as commandment and as creative word? And I think that, of course, it's obvious, people don't want to be required of.

When God speaks, something's required, or he's not speaking. God does not speak for effect. So we'd much rather have the word as suggestion, the word as homily, the word as devotion, the word as inspiration, not the word as event that requires.

This event requires us not to be afraid. When those doors come breaking in, not to be afraid. So the peace that is now being creatively expressed through the word has first been obtained through suffering at the cross.

The Lord is not conferring some light amenity. He's conferring a substantial event that was won and obtained by his own suffering and death at the cross. Therefore, he alone is authorized to speak it.

My peace, it's not anybody, my peace that I have so painfully obtained through suffering, now I confer to you. We avoid situations where the peace of God would be required. That is to say, we want to regulate our life where we can handle it and conduct it on the basis of our own ability and need not to create a word of God.

We're unwilling to pull out the stops and put ourselves in a place of extremity that requires God's peace. Now, how does Doubting Thomas come into all this? Is it just a historical accident that he was not there when Jesus appeared to the disciples? Or is God staging something, even through the unbelief of a disciple, to communicate something of importance? Let's look at that. Verse 24, But Thomas, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came.

Well, what a remarkable coincidence. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. Notice, not that we have also heard from the Lord.

But he said unto them, Except I shall see. Notice, everything is predicated on seeing, seeing, seeing, seeing. They're Jews.

They're fleshly men. They want that visible assurance. Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails and put my finger into the print of the nails and thrust my hand to his side.

I will not believe. Well, what do you think of a statement of that kind? A man who's going to mark himself by that statement as Doubting Thomas throughout history. I will not, except I shall see.

Why do you think it is that though they told him that they had seen the Lord, he did not yet believe them? We need to borrow in to get a portrait of Thomas because he's quintessential saint. There's a Thomas in all of us. And I will not, except I shall see, and refusing to believe the testimony of his brethren.

What does this, what kind of a portrait is being given here? Is this a man in relationship in the body? No, he doesn't trust the community. He doesn't trust the community. He's a self-willed individualist.

He's got to establish it himself or it's not valid. No wonder they needed the power of the spirit in dealing with Thomas and reckoning over the issue of sin because that which is not of faith is sin. So though we don't know what the sins, what Thomas' sins were, it's evident that they existed or he would not be unbelieving.

And probably that the sin is a self-willed individualism of a guy who does his own thing and has only his confidence in himself and will not receive from his brethren. I will not believe. The issue of resurrection is the name of the game.

It's the issue of the faith because if there's no resurrection, we of all men are most to be pitied. And certainly it's not enough merely to give creedal affirmation to the doctrine of resurrection but to believe in the actual power that raises the dead and makes those things to be which were not. Now, not only does Jesus allow Thomas to put his fingers in his wounds but he even speaks something in that power into that man.

Do you see that in the text? Not only does he not reprimand him but a personal creative word for himself. Maybe the depth of his disappointment was greater than all the rest. Maybe it sank in more deeply.

Maybe the picture of Jesus utterly spoiled at the cross, utterly wracked, gangrenous. Anyone who's seen that Grunewald masterpiece of Jesus on the cross knows what Thomas must have seen. No hope, I mean utterly devoid of life.

And therefore because of the greater depth of the apprehension of the death, the Lord is graciously giving him a greater revelation of the reality of the life. And here, okay, maybe that's one of the reasons why we are lacking in resurrection faith because we're lacking in the appropriation of the death. We have been superficial about the cross and therefore we have condemned ourselves to a superficiality about the resurrection.

We ourselves need to go back to the place of the beginning and recognize the magnitude of that death and our death. If we're going to appropriate the life. So these are great conjunctions, great events.

What do you make of 29 where Jesus said, Because thou hast seen me thou hast believed. Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed. Would you say more blessed? Or are you blessed because you have believed? Or you believe because you're blessed? That's no small question.

No, you took something visible. But those who will believe because I will confer a faith are blessed. They are blessed to believe something that except I confer it, they cannot believe it.

Because resurrection is calculated to be an ultimate offense to human intellect and credibility. And if you believe it, it's only because I have given you the faith to believe it. I have blessed you to believe it.

You have required to see it. But blessed are they who believe it without seeing. That's being blessed.

And it puts the entire premium upon God. In a word, God has set up a situation that except that he reveals it, no man can obtain it. That means that there are unnumbered tens of thousands of, quote, Christians sitting in churches who are subscribing to the doctrine of resurrection as being true who are not blessed.

They have never really believed an ultimately impossible thing to believe because it has not been given them by God. And maybe the reason is that they're satisfied with shallow creedal acceptance and don't want the blessing of a believing for the resurrection life lest they be required to exhibit it themselves. Getting the picture of what religion is? Only recently the Lord broke upon my heart that you can just as easily become deceived sitting in an orthodox Christian church whose tenets and doctrines are valid as you can by being a Mormon or a Jehovah's Witness or any other sect.

You can be deceived even subscribing to the truth because you're not holding the truth in righteousness but just being satisfied with the superficial creedal statement of it and about it. I'm glad this is going on tape. And by the way, these remarks that are coming out of me are the statement of that life.

I haven't rehearsed this. And this is the life, speaking and underlining and affirming things that God wants to sink deep into our hearing and understanding. And I'll make this final statement.

The final contest between what is apostate and what is apostolic will be between those who hold the doctrine of resurrection as doctrine as against those who eminently walk in the power of it. That's the final picture of the final clash of the persecutors and the persecuted. Not the world and the church, but those who purport to be church because they subscribe to the orthodox views of it but refuse to walk in the power of it as against those who do.

There's nothing more offensive still than the exhibition of the reality of resurrection life. They are the blessed ones. And wherever the blessed are, there'll be those who want to quench their light.

And we need to ask ourselves, Lord, have I been dangerously flirting with just mere acceptance of resurrection as doctrine without any real serious intent to live in the power of that life? Because he who is blessed, blesses others. And except that we bless others in the power of the resurrection, we bring no blessing. We have to do for the doubting Thomases of our generation what Jesus did for him by speaking a word in resurrection power.

Be not faithless, but be believing. Be. It's more than a head trip.

I wonder if there is such a thing as apostolic faith that is not the result of something creatively imparted in resurrection power by the risen Lord himself. And what is a false apostle are those who traffic in the language of apostolicity who have never had this blessing conferred. Boy, I've never said that before.

But we may be touching something very significant here. How can there be apostolic works except out of an apostolic faith that has been given by him who sends? As my father sent me, so send I you by speaking this word into you, which is the foundation of your faith, not your mental deduction, a logical summing up of the truths of the faith, but an actual impartation in resurrection power. You'll not be afraid, and you'll be blessed, and you'll be a blessing.

What would you say is offensive about what we are now saying? Not to men in the world, and not even to religious people, but even to spirit-filled, charismatic, and evangelical Christians of what we are now saying about what constitutes true blessedness. Here's really the A for the day. The student who can see this is getting to the heart of the matter of the deepest offense to man.

What is that offense? Nothing from you at all, and everything from me, except I confer it, except I give it, except I send it. You have nothing. You are nothing.

I am all in all, nothing from you, nothing from man, nothing from your well-meaning religious disposition to do for me. I am all in all. I am the creator God.

I am the resurrected one. I am the authoritative one. You have only to go, but only in my power and in my blessedness.

You remember when God sent Moses out of the burning bush? Could there have been a more remarkable man who had the best of both worlds, Hebrew of the Hebrews? I mean, he had a lineage that was so distinguished, and also a prince of Egypt. He had the advantage of the greatest erudition and learning available in his generation. But when God sent him, not when he sent himself and only slew an Egyptian to lay him in the sand.

When God sent him, Moses said, Who am I that I should go for you? And God never argued with him. That I will be with you. That's the basis for your being sent.

That's the heart of what is apostolic. Nothing of you in yourself, that's true. I've allowed you to brood for 40 years over what was the unhappy fruit of your self-initiated doing for me.

But now I will send you, and I will be with you. How else did you think to confront Satan, who is Pharaoh? And this, at its root, is the heart of all offense to man. When Jesus said, Accepted the Father, draw you.

No man can come to me except the Father. Many turned away from him in that day and followed him no longer. Because everything that had to do with man, what man could perform, or man's ability, or man's convictions, or man's principles, or man's religion, was completely removed.

Accept the Father, draw you. We need to recognize this. It's the heart of all offense.

And it may even, more than we realize, offend us. If there's anything lurking, yet lingering, that wants to express itself as our accomplishment for God. I'm not talking about carnality.

I'm talking about spirituality. Wanting to do significant things for God, but out of ourselves. Then this cuts us off at the pass.

And maybe it's for this reason that this episode is set in. Yes, you've seen, but now blessed are they who'll believe the same thing, not seeing without seeing. They'll believe it because they're blessed.

They'll not be blessed because they believe it. See what I mean? Are we on that ground? That's apostolic ground. And I'll tell you, to come on that ground, it's worth being a doubting Thomas.

It's worth finding yourself in opposition to God and not being aware of it, till he'll bring us through to this place where the issue of blessedness really lies. Paul said that, except you pray for me, he said that I might have grace for utterance. How shall I speak the things that I ought? It's got to be given.

You're again and again dependent on that which is given. And only on that basis can we go. Can we be sent once.

Fearful. What if God fails to provide? And there you are, the doors have burst in and in come the Hasidim, foaming at the mouth with their black fedora hats and beards and black eyes and ventilating all of their hatred and fury. And except God say or do something in that moment, I mean, then what? And as the Father has sent me, so send I you.

How did the Father send Jesus? Did he give him everything in advance and forewarn him of every situation and tell him how he's going to... Jesus lived as the man of faith by the Spirit, utterly dependent on the Father moment by moment for what is given. It's the most humiliating dependency. And who wants it? Who has grown up in this world and gone to college and has been taught how to be self-sufficient.

And God says, that's the world. Here's the way of my kingdom. Total dependence on me to whom all authority has been given.

Now, go ye into all the world and preach this gospel to every creature. Well, let me read from Oswald Chambers' selection of August 13th on Quench Not the Spirit. The voice of the Spirit is as gentle as a zephyr, so gentle that unless you are living in perfect communion with God, you never hear it.

The checks of the Spirit come in the most extraordinarily gentle ways. And if you are not sensitive enough to detect His voice, you will quench it, and your personal spiritual life will be impaired. His checks always come as a still small voice, so small that no one but the saint, I wrote true saint, notices them.

Everything is predicated. If you're going to receive from the God who gives both leadings and checks, you have got to be in an extraordinary relationship with the God who sends. As my father sent me, so send I you.

Or you're going to miss it. You'll not hear it. You'll not be able to receive it.

You'll be so taken in by the noise and the confusion or the fear that you'll miss the still small voice. Maybe we should spend a little time in prayer. Okay, Sandy? This will be a kind of like preliminary first experience for us, getting our feet wet in examining a text.

And I have to say that for myself, probably the most positive benefit of that seminary experience was the discipline of being required to remain within a text, and that it made me realize that up until now, up until that time, I had conducted myself with a certain kind of charismatic and prophetic liberty, finding a scripture here and there to make my point. But something happens of a very remarkable kind when you confine yourself within a text itself and don't go necessarily outside of it to make your point and let the Lord speak to us from that text. It's an intensive burrowing in.

And it's really amazing the riches that are to be found in a few verses. So here's an episode at the conclusion of the Gospel of John where Jesus reveals himself in his resurrection but not yet ascended form to the disciples who are yet full of fear and have not yet sorted out the meaning of the death of the Lord. And I don't think that the full implication of his resurrection has yet struck them.

And in the same breath I would say I don't think it's yet struck us and that there's no limit to what the meaning and implication of the resurrection of Jesus means and that we have all been knocking about on four cylinders rather than six for the want of a deeper appropriation of the meaning of the resurrection of Jesus. So maybe the Lord will open something to us here as we read. So from verse 19, Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut, when the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.

And when he had so said, he showed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord. Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you.

As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whosoever sins you remit, they are remitted unto them, and whosoever sins you retain, they are retained.

But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.

And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them. Then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands.

Reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side, and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed.

Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed. And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book, but these are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you might have life through his name. Amen.

Well, I'm just inviting you to leap in and to intensively examine this text. And just to give you a little teaser, in verse 26, And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them. Then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst and said, Peace be unto you.

So just to raise a question, why do you think it is that eight days later, eight is the resurrection number, Jesus making a second appearance, having already revealed himself in his resurrection body to his disciples, that the doors would still be shut? How do you account for a fear, seeing that the Lord has already appeared in his resurrection body, which is the testimony of the triumph of the cross, that all authority has been given unto him in heaven and earth, and yet eight days later they still need an affirmation or a strengthening of their faith? Or what do you think that the phrase, Peace be unto you, means? Do you think that that's just a little courtesy, a little courtesy, a little polite rhetorical flourish, a little Yiddish kite? Or is Jesus saying something with, Peace be unto you, to terrified disciples that we need to understand? Because we also are going to experience terror and fright and last day's extremity and persecution of a kindred kind. So everything that we will be examining in these days is not just merely historical. Well, how did they respond? And what were the issues that they faced? But what's the application for us in the issues that we will face? And how secure a grasp do we have of the things pertaining to the resurrection that will constitute our peace and our assurance? Do you understand what I'm saying? Okay.

So let's go back a little over this. Every time Jesus appears to them, the first thing he says is, Peace be unto you. Now we can either see that as just a conventional Jewish greeting or something more.

Who here sees that as something more, knowing that there's not a syllable in this text or in any of the scriptures that is in any way happenstance? There's nothing here that's mere courtesy or conventional. Every single syllable is charged with enormous divine content and meaning, including the amenity of what seems to be just a little gracious greeting, Peace be unto you. If that's more than just a little gracious meaning, what is its meaning? And why does Jesus repeat it twice? And why are they afraid? And why are they behind closed doors? And to what degree are we behind closed doors? You know, in a spiritual sense, not fully coming into the assurance and confidence that we need to be sent ones on the basis of his resurrection and his authority.

I always appreciate great questions more than I do correct answers. So I'm just operating here to show you and encourage you to theological reflection, which is to say the raising of good questions over a text. If we can raise the right questions, the answers will come.

And so we just have to acknowledge that we have been slothful ourselves, mentally and spiritually lazy, and have done what I have done over the years, just employ a verse here and there to make a point. But this exercise and discipline of getting into a text and burrowing in it and getting from it its meaning and its present and future application is really the choice work of godly students, and we will be enlarged thereby. Okay, that word shalom is just like every other Hebrew word, infinitely rich.

And I'm not going to give it to you. I don't know that I can, but I think it's the kind of thing that we need to explore. After all, this is actually the first resurrection word that Jesus is speaking to his disciples.

And of all of the words that he could have employed or chosen, he chose this. So here too, haven't we made that word shalom a kind of an anemic, casual expression? Anybody, like we say, bless you, brother, and shalom. Part of our function, who are jealous for apostolic and prophetic foundations, is to restore the integrity of language itself.

So it's a good thing to ask, what does that word really mean, and why did Jesus choose to employ it? And maybe we'll not understand that until we spend a few minutes examining why it is that they are afraid. Why are they behind closed doors? And if we don't understand their terror and their fear, a lot of this will be lost to us. I wonder if there's a kind of relapse, an effect that follows great events, that even the most heroic of God's servants feel a wave of fear that comes over them.

I don't know if any of you have. Of course, you've not experienced great events. That's your problem.

But maybe there is something that we need to sense, because we are being called to great events, and that maybe we can suspect that on the very heels of it comes a remarkable negative reaction, where the enemy comes in like a flood and plays upon your weakness, your doubting, your uncertainty. Maybe though Doubting Thomas was the first actually to articulate, I will not believe, to what degree and depth did the others believe, even in the seeing of the resurrected Christ? Because in another text it says, They did not yet believe unto joy. And the fact that they would yet be behind closed doors eight days later seems to suggest that their belief is not all that it should be.

Because if they had a supreme confidence in the resurrected Lord, why are they yet cowering in fear? O ye of little faith, why are you afraid? Fear is always the antithesis of faith. Now when Jesus is saying, Peace be unto you, is He making a suggestion or is He declaring an event? When Jesus says, Peace be unto you, He's not encouraging you to consider something in your mind. He is establishing your peace by His word.

That's what we need to recognize. Because the day will come when we will need to establish things by our word. So the whole faith in the power of the word and the proclamation of the word needs to be ours.

So this is not just a little casual greeting. This is an event. The speaking is itself an event because Jesus appreciates and understands the magnitude of their fear.

And I want to read to you what I've written here from my paper about that fear. It is appropriate then to find the disciples behind locked doors in fear, not yet surmising the meaning of the empty tomb. That they were assembled for fear of the Jews, in verse 19, is perhaps a deeper intimation beyond the levels of human consciousness of the ultimate earthly power expressed through religious and secular means that had just devastatingly brought to death their Master and their Lord.

Now I know that when you read something you have to fight for the meaning of it. But this is picking up with what Jim touched. The same kind of fear that Elijah experienced because what brought Jesus to death was the operation of the powers of darkness expressed through the ultimate religious form of Judaism at that time in concert with the ultimate political form of Roman rule.

And I don't think we appreciate this. Jesus was the victim of the powers of darkness in their ultimate configuration. And these disciples witnessed both his apprehension, his suffering, and his death.

They saw the fury of hell poured out on their teacher and coming through the Jewish community principally, and I hope I'm not encouraging anybody's anti-Semitism, but I think that it resides there or has opportunity there beyond anything that we presently recognize. There's something about that configuration of things in Jewish religious mentality that was expressed by that high priest that it was necessary that one man die for the nation lest we lose our place. We need to get a sense of this.

What the crucifixion of death of Jesus registered upon their souls, what they witnessed, it was terrifying because all of them had said, though all the world deny you, yet will we deny you never. And yet when the night of terror came, when Jesus was apprehended and the fact of it struck, they all fled and they all betrayed him, and some, like Peter, shamefully. So if we're going to appreciate the statement, peace be unto you, and the confidence that Jesus is wanting to impart in the demonstration of himself as resurrected, and now I send you as the Father has sent me, we need to begin with a clearer sense of what their fear is, that eight days later they're still behind closed doors.

It's a fear that nobody in this room has ever yet experienced, and some of us in this room will. Now what is the anatomy of that fear? It's the depth of depths. It's the enemy poured out, bearing his fangs.

It's seeing how ruthless and how devastating he can be as he ventilated all that is intrinsic to his darkness upon Jesus and left him shredded, marred more than any man. None of us can imagine what Jesus looked like in his death, and one way that we can begin to sense it is the two on the road to Emmaus who were so disconsolate, so dejected, so broken, because they had seen him hang in that pitiful condition, that every last hope they had was shredded equally with the shredded load. So how many of us have ever faced the Jewish community head on? How many of us have ever seen behind the facade of politeness and civility and moral and ethical value that the Jewish community endorses something of the antagonism against God that has opportunity there? Maybe we'll get to this in another way at some other time, but I believe this has everything to do with the historic failure of the church to go to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

The church has missed the priority of God because it intuitively recognizes just how monumental a threat and how formidable a presence the Jewish thing is. They were behind closed doors for the fear of the Jews, and one of my experiences was speaking at Vassar College in upstate New York and spending the day there, and as I passed one of the Jewish students, a number of Jews frequent that place, this young fellow looked up at me and said, you'll get yours tonight. I thought, what does that mean? But it wasn't long that I found out that that night as I was preaching on Abraham and circumcision, the doors burst open and in came about a dozen black, fedora-hatted, bearded, orthodox Hasidim.

I'll tell you that the mafia would look like boy scouts next to the terror that came into that room when these guys burst in, and not one sat. They placed themselves strategically around the room, and I never watched a congregation of Christians go berserk as I saw them that night. It was like lifting the lid off a garbage can.

You can't imagine what came out. Fear, anger, resentment. But before that, if I had said, how many of you here love the Jewish people, every hand would have gone up.

But when the Jewish people came in, in the depth of their religious antagonism to God and truth, everything changed. We were taken by surprise. And what we reveal when we're taken by surprise is what we, in fact, are.

And one of these guys stood about the distance from me as flora, peering at me with burning eyes like I was Hitler himself, and then they began to take over. And how dare I come with the King James Bible in my ignorance? And da-da-da-da-da. It was just an evening never to be forgotten.

I think I would, in terms of stark terror, I would say that that night exceeded the occasion at Jack, what's his name's church in Los Angeles? Hayford. When the doors burst open again, and a band of Jewish

radicals, like the JDL, came walking down each aisle toward me, and the guy that was walking down the center aisle had a knit cap and something under it, which I thought surely was a vial of acid, to be thrown in my face. And I was preaching on Acts 16 and the apostolic encounter, and it was happening.

Everyone stopped breathing. And what saved the day was that a brother whom I had just recently baptized, a new convert, a Hollywood writer, too young and illiterate to know better, he's about 6'4 or 6'5, got out of his seat, and he grabbed this guy by the scruff of the neck and by the seat of his pants and just hoisted him right out of the room. And I didn't object.

These are little, what shall I say, pre-last days foreshadowings of the kinds of abrupt confrontations that are going to take place, particularly in God's last days dealing with the Jewish people, who are already so hyper and so sensitive and so defensive of their Jewishness and their insecurity that anything mediated toward them, however well-meaning, has got to be misunderstood and be misconstrued by them as threat. We need to know that. It's not going to be apparent to them that we have hearts full of love and desire, their redemptive recognition of the Lord.

To them we represent a threat that is contrary to the thing they want most to preserve, namely their slight sense of Jewishness that is being attacked from every angle, even the angle of intermarriage that is already now like 65% of all American Jewish marriages. So we're a threat. And there's something here that is not to be found in any ethnic group.

This is not your ordinary resistance to the Gospel. There's something here of an additional kind that is at the heart of the powers of darkness of this present world that has employed my people unhappily throughout their whole apostasy to be the agents, even unwittingly, of these powers to bring about schemes and devices contrary to God's intention, like Marxism and all of the other kinds of things in which we Jews have been so expert. Have you noticed that the Lord does not encourage us to try it out in the sticks first and then if it works there you bring it into the big city and put it up on Broadway? He says, begin at Jerusalem where I was crucified, where the prophets were stoned.

Then you can go to Samaria and the uttermost corners of the earth. Don't begin where it's easiest. Begin where it's hardest.

Like right from the beginning, head on, meet the issue. Don't delay. Face it in the authority that is mine by virtue of my obedience to the Father unto death and resurrection.

All authority is given to me. Now that's what he says, but when he's not visibly present, can you still believe that and face the outraged Jewish community that has just crucified him and will crucify others who continue in the same truth that he exemplified? I think that what we're missing is a sense of the scandal of the gospel, the terrible offense of the gospel, as it is most revealed when it comes into confrontation with everything that men celebrate as wisdom, as righteousness, as religion, as morality, as ethics, as culture, which we Jews have developed and propounded to the farthestmost state. The point of greatest antagonism and conflict is where the foolishness and the scandal of the gospel meets the wisdom of the world head on, and that's represented by the Jewish community that has just crucified that wisdom.

And now these who were the observers of that terror, the ferocity of it, the unveiled bestiality, are now going to have to go into the same place and continue the work that he began, the same messianic task. As the Father has sent me, so send I you. I can just hear them saying, great, what else is new? You pick up where I left off.

You continue in the thing that eventuated in my crucifixion. And of course, what do we know? That not one of these men survived. And with the exception of John, to die a natural death, every single one of them suffered a violent death.

And if this is the commencement of the gospel dispensation, the beginning of it, the sending by the resurrected one, what will be its conclusion in the last days? And don't we again need, therefore, to fully appropriate the assurance and the peace that Jesus gave, or it has yet not stumbled on the antagonism that the gospel is to the world. And maybe part of the reason is because our gospel is not that gospel. It's not the gospel of the kingdom.

It does not threaten the status quo. It does not unseat the security and the whole mindset and way of life of people who consider and receive it by making the decision. But maybe when it becomes this gospel again, to radically overturn everything to which a person has given himself, then we're going to know the reaction of violence against us.

So this is good to begin to borrow in and understand what's represented in just these few verses. Let me finish this statement here. I'll read it again.

It is appropriate then to find the disciples behind locked doors in fear, not yet surmising the meaning of the empty tomb. That they were assembled for fear of the Jews, quote and unquote, is perhaps a deeper intimation beyond the levels of human consciousness of the ultimate earthly power expressed through religious and secular means that had just devastatingly brought to death their master and their lord. All that stands for authority and power of the present age, politically and religiously, had triumphed.

Its visibility and impressiveness, having all the marbles, so to speak, continues. It is indeed something to be feared, for the powers of hell are resident in it, and the church that fails still to see this cannot itself appropriate in full the resurrection mandate or power and must, as time itself I think has corroborated, turn Easter into a chocolate bunny's spring event. Let me go over that last piece there.

If we don't understand the reason for their fear, we'll not be able to appropriate the reason for their confidence and their peace. And we will turn the resurrection event into a kind of cultural celebration, which it has become. This resurrection, you see, we're missing it at every point.

We don't know as we ought to know. We don't understand and know God as we ought. The gospel is a parody of what it was at the first and needs again to become.

The resurrection has only become a doctrine to which we subscribe as being correct. The world has denigrated it and made it only a kind of Easter Sunday chocolate bunny egg-rolling thing. That's why we need to go back to the first.

We need to go back to the beginning and dig out this event here that's being described. It's been lost, and so it will not have the meaning for us that we need unless we can begin to assess the fear. We haven't even begun to look at, and Jesus breathed the Spirit upon them, receiving the Holy Spirit.

What would you rather receive? The continuing physical and visible presence of the Lord or the Spirit that is given because he's going to be absent from us? And on the basis of what he has breathed and on the basis of the way he has spoken, will that be sufficient for you? To establish you in what the Shalom of God is, which is not just a Shabbat night greeting, but Shalom in the moment when the doors burst open and the Hasidim come in. That's when you test whether you're in the Shalom of God. Anybody can have it

when the candles are burning and we're having a little Yiddish kite and a nice evening.

But the issue of our peace is in the midst of threat, in the midst of terror, will we then be at peace because the Lord had said so and because he has breathed his Spirit into us? This is the way the whole Gospel dispensation begins and this is the way, therefore, it is going to end. It's always true that as also in the beginning, so also in the end. And that's why we need to get this beginning into our own spirits, even to the place where it becomes for us a place of true beginning.

So that wherever we are spiritually behind closed doors, fearful, threatened, intimidated, subscribing to correct doctrines about resurrection and even speaking the word Shalom, yet failing for the reality of it, we need to come through into something on the basis of this text. These things are written that you might believe. Verse 31, now how come that's there? Exactly for this, that you, who's the you? The Lord anticipating the generations of believers that will follow even us now in this moment.

These things are written that you might believe. That Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that believing you might have life through his name. That word life, what synonym would you put there for life? What is implied in life? That you have physical, biological continuation? What's the life? The life is what you exhibit when the Hasidim are as close to you as flora and are spitting in your face and calling you every name in the book and your mind goes blank and you can't think of a clever thing to say to rebuke them.

What comes forth then has got to be the life of the Lord. How come, Art? Because it's not your reputation that's riding in that moment. It's the eternal issue of their salvation who have come to harass, to mock and to destroy.

Nevertheless, they're coming head to head with a piece of the resurrected Christ in us. And what he will say and exhibit in the power of that life may have a depth of penetration that only eternity will reveal. I'm a man of very poor memory, but here's one thing I remember about that night.

As this guy who was closest to me was railing, at one point he said, And we know that you love us, cats, but... And then he went on to say something else, but I didn't hear the rest of it. I thought to myself, I never told you that. How do you know that? And I don't know where he got that.

We had never met before. Whether it's by reputation or something communicated, I don't know. But that you might have life by believing in his name.

Let me just take a moment's breath right here. Do you realize that every single thing that we have been considering so far stands perilously in danger of becoming religion? His name can become a formula. Resurrection can become a mindless doctrine to which we give assent.

Shalom could become a cutesy little benediction. Everything that is charged here with such replete meaning as end-time provision for us can, if we miss it by ever so little, become transmuted into religion, so that in his name becomes a formula, that if you rub the genie lamp in the name of Jesus, something comes out. We have got to contend for the faith, saints, once and for all, given the saints.

And that's what we are presently doing and will do in all these days. We are starting easy. This is a light exercise.

Nevertheless, it contains all of the elements that will be with us in every time we sit down together to consider the things of God. We need to realize that the world, the flesh, and the devil has a remarkable

facility to transmute the holy things of God and turn them into religious pap. So we have got to fight and go back in and get the original meaning and make it our own, or we are goners when the doors burst open and the unexpected thing comes for which we are not fitted because we do not believe in the peace of God, we do not believe in the name of God and have not appropriated the things that are made available through his resurrection.

Are you following me? That's why we are probing here. Nothing is more viciously opposed to the faith than religion. And that's what terrified Elijah and terrifies them.

When religion is threatened, and we are going to hopefully get into this, what is religion and why is it inimical to God? One of the greatest ironies and paradox that that which purports to be about God is most opposed to God and opposed violently and ruthlessly. You need to understand that and to recognize what religion is. So whether it comes from Jews, let me say this, what we are calling Jewish is probably also Protestant, denominational, Catholic, all of the intrinsic elements that made up the Judaism that crucified Christ is yet to be found in all normative and conventional religious bodies today.

And that though we are presently in a quiescent mood where they are not expressing an antagonism to the apostolic faith, it will not long remain that. When the faith that is true begins to confront them, you can expect there will be the mask off and the fangs bared and the same hostility again revealed. So we're preparing ourselves for a soon coming eventuality.

That's a good point. When we say Jewish, we're getting at something much deeper and it's to be found in every religious and institutional thing that is opposed to true faith. You might just make a little note for yourself and reflect on this and maybe write up a couple paragraphs.

What is the nature of religion and why is it antagonistic to God to the point of crucifying with devastating brutality the God whom it presumes to celebrate? This is not an option. This is a requirement. Unless you understand this, the whole last days will be a mystery to you and you'll be unfitted not only to serve in the last days but to stand because one of the most vital aspects will be a last days confrontation between religious and political system, Jezebel and Ahab versus the Elijah band, the true prophetic faith.

So we need to understand what is there about the nature of religion by its very nature that makes it so intrinsically opposed to God even in the name of God. And if we had time and we had ability to begin to describe the horrendous assault on the sons and daughters of God through history, the blood would rise to the ceilings. The roll call of martyrs, of tortured victims.

It's not just people put to death. Put to death with spite, with maliciousness, with delight in seeing them suffer. There's something in the spirit of religion that is so inimical to God and to God's people that we need to understand, which had just been abruptly demonstrated to these disciples when they saw it visited upon Jesus.

We need to understand their fear. Let's look into the text. Is he pushing them out from behind closed doors? Where does it show us that? And A for the day for the first one who spots it.

Peace be to you as the Father has sent me, I also send you. Okay, verse 21. This isn't Jesus coming to give them a little pat on the back.

This is Jesus coming to send. So sending, receiving the Holy Spirit, the word of peace. Everything is set in these few verses.

Let's dwell on that for a bit. As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. Why didn't he just say, I'm sending you? Why does he even have to refer to as my Father hath sent me? What purpose does that serve? If every word is of God, what purpose does that word serve? Good.

So the sending is not a kind of a technical ministerial thing, but something that comes out of relationship. And if the relationship is not there, you're not being sent as he was sent. Nor will you have a comparable result.

As the Father hath sent me, so send I you. So the sending comes out of a relationship with the Father, with a knowledge of God, or that sending is vain. And what question rises in your mind like, if that's true, Art, then what can we say about the preponderance of religious things that the Church has been doing historically since that time and now even today? How much of our acts and religious activity is out of a sending derived from relationship with the Father? And how many of us would not presume to go until that relationship is sure? And don't think that by these few questions we're exhausting what is implied in this, as my Father hath sent me, so send I you.

It's in the same character, it's in keeping with his same purpose, it will be in the same power, it comes out of the same relationship. You're going to be a continuum of what I have expressed till now. No small thing to men who are terrified and sitting behind locked doors.

And the whole destiny and future of the gospel endeavor rests on their ability to do it, or there's no continuation and no future. How do you like them apples, the faith of God, Jim? In fact, we can even make a little collection of the last comments of these men. Though the world deny you, we deny you never, and later on even Peter saying, what shall this man do? And there's still a competition, a striving, a jealousy.

I mean, God is taking some really crude material and charging them with the same commission that he himself had. Talk about the faith of God. Has anything changed since that time? Has the Lord revised his strategy? Is there any work that can be considered God's work today that is significant and messianic, apostolic, that can be performed outside of this context? Maybe just to take a moment and talk about how ministerially minded we are, particularly as Westerners and as Americans.

Very little thought about relationship, but everything about doing and having a ministry and what are you doing and what are you performing. It's not the emphasis of the Lord at all. We need to be restored to something that relationship precedes service and relationship of a very particular kind, of the kind that the son had with the father.

I'll tell you that might call for like a moratorium on all present activity for a considerable time to let a relationship be established. And in fact, what has most threatened that kind of relationship but the activity itself. In fact, the activity probably stands as a substitute for the relationship because it's tougher to be than it is to do.

God's doing always comes out of being. Be not afraid. Peace be unto you.

The emphasis is on being. Who can figure out why verse 23 is included in this text at all? How did that get in there? What does that got to do with what we're talking about? It doesn't seem to be like a detour. Why would sin now come into the discussion? And that those to whom he's speaking and breathing his spirit will have an authority to remit or to retain sins.

Whose sins do you think is being referred to here? The Jews? Is it the world?

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