

How miserable the disciples were on that evening of that first Easter! They were completely convinced that Jesus was dead. Yeah, the women had said that he was alive, but who could believe them? Maybe they just wanted it to be true. Maybe that was just their way of dealing with the grief. But the disciples didn't think that it was true. In their minds, Jesus was still dead. All their hopes were ruined. And for this reason, their hearts were filled with fear, especially because of the Jews. The Jews, after all, had killed Jesus. Why wouldn't they go on to do something with them as well? Some of the Jews, after all, had tried to connect Peter to Jesus on Good Friday, and Peter denied it, fearful of what might happen to him at their hands. And so now, filled with that same fear, all of them went into hiding, locking the doors behind them in the hopes of getting away from the world. Here, they thought, they would be safe. Here, they thought, they would not have to face a hostile world.

Now, it's easy for us to kind of smirk at the disciples here. Don't they know that Jesus is alive? Why would they hide? Can't they see the truth? It's so obvious! Why can't they get it? It's almost like we're watching a movie where we know something that they don't, and that leaves us feeling pretty smug. It's almost comical to watch them struggle in this way. All they need to do is just figure it out, and then everything will be better. Then they won't have to worry anymore. The credits will roll, and we'll be able to talk about how good of a movie it was. It all seems so obvious.

And yet, Christians, are we really so different from the disciples here? Yes, we know that Jesus is alive. We know what's going to happen next in the Bible, but we need to look at ourselves today. Just because we're not hiding in a room with the door locked doesn't mean that we aren't still trying to hide away from the world. Because, Christians, our world today is going downhill, faster and faster every day it seems. We live in a world where our leaders are openly hostile against the Gospel, where they're openly hostile against God and his Word. They don't even try to hide it anymore. We live in a world where people call us bigots simply for saying what the Bible says. We live in a world where everything that we used to take for granted simply is gone. Our world has become something much different from what we remember. But instead of meeting the world head on, instead of getting out there and doing something about it, how often do we try to hide? Just keep our hands down! Don't cause a scene. Don't get noticed. They'll leave you alone if they don't know that you're here. As long as they don't know that I'm a Christian, then I won't have to deal with these things. Or maybe we even say: "It could never happen here. Things are different here in the middle of North Dakota. All of that stuff is somewhere out there. It'll never come here. I don't need to worry about it. I don't need to pay attention, because this is where I live." But that too, Christians, is a kind of hiding. It's trying to deal with the world by simply ignoring it. But what are we going to do when we can no longer hide? What are we going to do when the things out there come here? Will we be ready for them? Or are we still going to try to hide away from the world the way that the disciples did?

Well, at least we know that Jesus is alive, we say! The disciples didn't know that. We've got that going for us. Surely that must make a difference! But do we? Do we know that Jesus is alive? And if we know that, why do we still act like he is dead? Fearful of the world around us, fearful of what might happen to us, fearful of what we might lose in this life because we belong to Jesus. Do we forget that Jesus is alive when faced with all the evil of this world? Do we forget that Jesus lives in our fear of what might happen in the days ahead? Christians, when we look at

ourselves rightly, we will see that we are not that different from the disciples on that first Easter eve.

But Christians, Jesus is alive! That's the message, the good news that he gave to the disciples on that day. He appeared among them in his glorious and resurrected body as their risen Lord and Savior, and he gave to them a peace, a peace which passes all understanding. "Peace be with you!" he says. And that peace which he gives is something which lives in the midst of danger. It is a peace which casts out all fear. The disciples were indeed glad when they saw the Lord and when they heard him say these words, because now they could unlock the door. Now they didn't need to hide. Now they knew that Jesus is alive. And knowing that he is alive meant that they had everything. Let the world do whatever it wants! What could they possibly take away from them? Jesus is alive, never to die again! And for that reason, the disciples were no longer afraid.

And Jesus also gave them a clear promise in our reading, verse 21: "As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." He sent them out into the world to do his work, promising that he would be with them as they went. They would not be alone, because God would work through them. And Jesus gives them even more than this, verse 22: "And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'" They had the Holy Spirit as a proof that they were not alone. God was working through them, doing his work in the world, so that whenever they spoke, God was speaking through them. Whenever they acted, God was acting through them. Whenever they forgave sins, God was forgiving sins. Whenever they bound sins, God was binding them. They did not have to be afraid, because God was with them through it all. And armed with that clear promise, the disciples went out into the world confident and joyful, even giving their very lives in the service of God. They were so filled with the peace of God that even though most of them died horrible deaths as martyrs, they were not afraid. Because they had Jesus, and that was more than anything that this world could give.

Christians, this is our comfort too. Christ sends us out into a world which hates us, but we are not alone. The Holy Spirit dwells in our hearts by faith. When we speak, God speaks through us. When we do good, God works through us. God is with us all the way. So why should we be afraid? God is for us! Who can be against us? Nothing in this world can ever take us away from him. And more than this, Christians, Jesus lives! Jesus is alive! Knowing that, who cares what the world says? Who cares what we might lose? Because what God gives to us in Jesus Christ is far greater than anything in this world. We do not have to be afraid, because Jesus lives, never to die again!

But does that mean that we can just sit around and do nothing? No. Jesus says very clearly, Matthew chapter 10: "Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves." We still need to be wise. We still need to be prepared for what is to come, so that we are not caught off guard, thinking that it can never happen here. We need to be prepared for hardship as Christians. We even need to be prepared to do without, if that's what it takes to follow after Jesus. If that means losing a friend because we are a Christian, then so be it. If that means losing our job because we are a Christian, then so be it. If that means being treated like an outsider, being called a terrorist, whatever it may be, then so be it. We need to be ready for these things. It's important for us to be prepared for whatever may come. And being prepared is not just about being prepared mentally so that we can deal with these things. And it's not about just being prepared through prayer. But it's also being ready for whatever may

come: to help one another, to care for one another, so that we will be able to get through whatever comes. Making sure that the needs of others are met, whatever those needs may be. If that means money, if that means food, if that means providing for them, then so be it. That's what we need to do. We need to take care of our own, to watch out for each other the way that the first Christians did for the first three hundred years of the Church. That is also what it means to be ready for what is to come. Now, being prepared like this doesn't mean being afraid, Christians. Let the worst come. What difference does it make? We still have the kingdom! We still have Jesus! They can never take that away. But being prepared means being wise in the midst of an evil world so that we are not surprised, knowing that God is with us and that God will care for us, just as we care for one another.

So Christians, let us be ready. Let us speak the Word of God without fear. Let us love one another and care for one another as Christians. Because no matter what may come, no matter what the world may do, we will be ready, because we will be safe in the hands of God.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, give us your peace that passes all understanding so that we may face this hostile world without fear. Help us to prepare ourselves and one another for whatever may come, knowing that you will deliver us from them all. We ask this in the name of our risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, your Son. Amen.