

## **Bible Study Guide: Week of 5-25-2020**

If these words sound especially familiar, it is because this text made up the first half of our gospel reading for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter (what we often call “Thomas Sunday”). Although we are studying the same passage here, I will do my best to offer some different insights here than I offered a few weeks ago.

1. Read through the passage below
2. Read my notes and commentary
3. Read the questions at the end and ponder or discuss with others

Pastor Andrew

### **John 17:1-11**

### **John 20:19-23**

19 When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." 22 When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

---

**19 When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."**

We should all be able to relate to this reaction of the disciples. Remember, “that day” refers to Easter Sunday. Their reaction to the confusing and not yet clear events of Good Friday and Easter Sunday is to meet behind locked doors—to wait, to hide, to hunker down. They have retreated to the same upper room where they shared a last night with Jesus prior to his crucifixion. We, too, I think, share this tendency to try to withdraw to the safe and familiar. I hear it in the desire some of us express to “get back to normal.” We lament the fact that there is not going to be a “normal” like we used to know, at least not for a great while. In John’s gospel, the Easter moment and Pentecost moment come at the same time and these moments come precisely at the time and place that the disciples are huddled in fear and unsure of how to proceed. Jesus’ gift of peace is one we need to receive, too.

**20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you."**

After offering physical confirmation of his identity, death, and resurrection, Jesus again gave them the gift of his peace. Earlier in the gospel, Jesus said that he “does not give peace as the world gives.” (14:27) Keep in mind that Rome prided itself on offering peace to its people (the famed Pax Romana or Roman Peace lasted about 200 years and occurred during Jesus’ lifetime). Rome’s peace was ensured by military might, taxation, and conquest. 200 years is a long time, but such peace is not everlasting. Jesus’ peace, by contrast, was won and given by his own willing sacrifice. He laid down his life and took it back up again to ensure peace that would last forever for his followers. Now, Jesus sends the disciples to continue this work of love, sacrifice, and peacemaking.

**22 When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."**

When I wrote about this on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Easter I noted that Jesus gives the Holy Spirit here, whereas according to Acts, the Spirit was not given until Pentecost, 50 days later. I encouraged us to think of this not so much as an either/or, but rather as a both/and. It is not as though the Holy Spirit is bound by our rules or bound by our notions about chronological time. The Spirit (or wind—it is the same word in Greek) indeed blows where it chooses, as Jesus says in John 3:8. The Spirit was not *only* given at Easter. The Spirit was not *only* given at Pentecost. Therefore, the Spirit is free to come into our midst even here and now to lead and guide us anew.

Jesus' act of breathing on the disciples is reminiscent of the creation account in Genesis 2:7 in which God formed a human being out of dust and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. This is also similar to the prophetic vision Ezekiel had of God breathing into the formerly dry bones the breath of life (Ezekiel 37). Just as God acted to create humankind and to restore Israel, now through Christ, God is acting again to form a new creation—the church.

The notion of sin in the Gospel of John is a bit different than what we might think of as sin. We often think of sin as wrongdoing, but in John's gospel "sin" refers to a failure to accept the truth as revealed in Jesus. Those who cannot come to believe in Jesus are said to be in sin. Understood in this way, then, the ability to forgive or retain the sins of any really amounts to the ability to proclaim the truth of Christ to others and to invite them to believe in him. The task that awaits the church is indeed the same as the task that Jesus came to enact—to testify to the truth and reveal the works and glory of God.

#### **Reflection/Discussion Questions:**

1. In what ways do we receive the peace Jesus gives? How are you experiencing God's peace during these difficult days?
2. Where or how in your life do you feel you have received the Holy Spirit? Was it at your baptism? Was it during some particularly meaningful experience? Was it a one-time occasion?
3. How do you define "sin?" What would it mean for us as the church to forgive or retain the sins of any?