

He's Alive and I'm Forgiven

John 20:1-9, 19-23

(Message based on text above. Used song *He's Alive* by Don Francisco instead of reading text.)

Have you ever let someone down? A friend just needed to talk, to sort some things out, but the NCAA championship game was on. That new mom you've been getting to know needed to get out of the house, catch her breath, regroup, but you couldn't find the time to watch her children. A couple experiencing a big bump in their marriage reaches out, but you don't want to get involved. Perhaps you've been so wrapped up in your own desires that you leave your spouse out of your life, compromising your marriage covenant. A word spoken out of turn, a deed left undone, an inappropriate action, we've all done them and the result was compromise. Maybe it didn't seem like such a big deal at the time. But, you let someone down and risked losing a friend.

Peter wasn't just a close friend of Jesus; he was chosen to be a part of the inner circle together with James and John. Peter was being groomed to be a leader in the church. None of the disciples were more vocal and demonstrative about his loyalty to Jesus than Peter. Peter declared Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Peter was the one who walked on water with Jesus. Peter was the one who declared undying allegiance to Jesus, "even if everyone else should fall away." Peter was the one who pulled a sword and cut off the High Priest's servant's ear in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus and Peter were tight.

But when Peter had the opportunity to prove his undying devotion and allegiance to Jesus, He let Jesus down. Not once, but three times, the last with an expletive, Peter denies that he even knows Jesus. Just then, as Jesus is being brought from one interrogation room to another, Peter looks up to see Jesus looking at him. Guilt, shame, emptiness, and regret are overwhelming. Peter can't be there any more; he turns and runs away. What's worse, Peter never

sees Jesus alive again. Jesus is sentenced to death and crucified the next day. The last thing Peter has said and done has let Jesus down and there is no way to take any of it back.

Do you know what that feels like? I'm sure you do. But just in case you are beginning to say, "I'd never let Jesus down," remember that Jesus taught us that what we do to others, good or bad, we do to him. Therefore, when I let you down, I also let Jesus down. When you let others down, you let Jesus down.

Now you're feeling what Peter felt, aren't you? A pit develops in your stomach. Roloids and Tums don't work. The plop and fizz of Alka-Seltzer gives no relief. What you'd really like to do is just turn away and hide. We really would rather avoid at all costs the one we've let down as well as any who would like to take advantage of your weakness.

That's what Peter's feeling and doing that morning, locked in a room with the other disciples when Mary comes banging on the door shouting that Jesus' body is missing. Peter's love for Jesus is strong enough to raise his curiosity. So he runs to the tomb with John, but he can't bring himself to go inside until John confirms what Mary said. But the empty tomb doesn't lighten his heavy heart. He had betrayed his master and let his best friend down. How could he possibly face Jesus even if he was alive? Peter makes his way back to the room and locks the door.

Yet, it is into this locked room of disciples locked in their grief and shame that Jesus comes and stands among them. John tells us they were all overjoyed to see Jesus alive; I'm sure that included Peter. But let's set aside the resurrection miracle for just a moment. How do you respond to someone you've let down, deserted, and denied when he's standing right there in front of you? If I were Peter, I think I'd rather be anywhere else but there at that particular

moment. It's hard to look a person in the eye when we've betrayed a trust. The expected reaction of disappointment, questioning, and anger ... We have it coming but we'd rather not face it.

But Jesus is unwilling to condemn and he is unwilling to let Peter stay down. As Jesus himself said, "*God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him*" (Jn.3:17). When Jesus appears in the room his immediate word is "*Shalom,*" translated "*Peace be with you!*" This is more than just a traditional greeting and goes beyond simply alleviating their fear. The word "Shalom" intends a rich blessing that the physical, moral, and spiritual well being of the recipient would be as it was always intended to be. Coming from Jesus, who just redeemed humanity from the curse of the law and conquered sin and death, "Shalom" means "*may it be as God intended it to be ... free of sin, guilt, and shame.*"

It is when Peter receives this peace and the forgiveness that Jesus offers that he is truly able to celebrate that Jesus is alive. Without the forgiveness that is now freely available because of Jesus' death and resurrection it would not have mattered that Jesus was alive; the relationship would still have been severed and Peter's life would have effectively been over. But with the realization of peace and forgiveness comes the marvelous understanding that Jesus is alive. And, with the realization that Jesus is alive comes the marvelous understanding of forgiveness and peace. It was this that Peter needed to experience when Jesus came to him; and, it is this that we need to experience this morning.

Though we have gathered in worship to celebrate Easter and rightly began singing praises to God because Jesus is alive, if we will be honest have to admit that we are often locked in guilt and shame. We have let someone down and betrayed their trust. We have let God down and betrayed his trust. **Jesus is alive.**

“Shalom.” We are dealing with a broken relationship; and now realize that has affected our relationship with God. **Jesus is alive.**

“Peace be with you.” We’ve done something we don’t want to think about but it eats away at our being; can we ever be forgiven? **Jesus is alive.**

And, yes, you are forgiven because **Jesus is alive.**

Jesus is here, right now, standing in the space of our locked guilt and shame. Look up into his face and you, too, will see “love shining out from him like sunlight from the sky.” Jesus’ answer to your fear and shame is that He’s alive and you are forgiven! His word to you is “Shalom,” may it be with you as God always intended it to be ... free, as guilt, confusion, and shame disappear in sweet release.

Give yourself again or for the first time to Jesus. May every fear you’ve ever had melt into peace!