

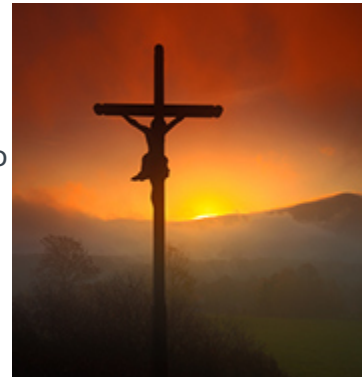
# Huddled and Scared

**November 2020**

On the night before Jesus was arrested, his disciples were huddled together and scared. They were seated in an upper room with only candles lighting their gathering. Jesus was telling them he needed to leave them once and for all so that someone else could take his place, namely the Holy Spirit. He also mentioned that someone in the room was about to betray him. The disciples were struggling to understand what Jesus was saying; they could not have been more unsettled. Slowly, they were gaining the sense that Jesus was about to be murdered, and possibly they were destined to face the same fate, too. In other words, things were not looking good from the perspective of Jesus' closest followers. Without Jesus with them, how in the world could they possibly face the world outside?

In many ways, we in the United States might be feeling the same kind of trepidation and fear these days as we look out our own windows. We have been huddled in our houses since March, fearful of venturing too far out from the safety of our homes. For many people, savings accounts have dwindled, causing tremendous insecurity and even fright. The coronavirus seems to be lurking around every corner, wanting to enter our bodies, causing temporary or permanent harm, or even leading to death itself. And, if that were not enough, we Americans have become increasingly fearful of each other, discerning if someone is from a Red or Blue state, or potentially members of a group that believes in violence as a way of expressing their political or racial views. Secluding at home or hanging out with only people just like ourselves have become more attractive options by the day.

After Jesus was arrested, dragged from the Garden of Gethsemane and later crucified, the disciples' worst fears had become a reality. The dark forces of the world had emerged victorious as Jesus' dead body was placed and sealed in a nearby tomb. In this dejected and frightened state of mind, the disciples' first instinct was to run back to their upper room in Jerusalem, lock the doors, and hope that no Jewish or Roman authorities would find them. As they hunkered down in their insecurities and fears, Jesus suddenly appeared to them in his resurrection body and said these famous words: "Peace be with you... As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you...Receive the Holy Spirit." (John 20:19b,21b,22b)



God knows when we are fearful and even paralyzed by life's circumstances. That is often when the Lord appears to us and calls us to his side and into his light. He does not want us to hide out, locked in our rooms and huddled in fear of the outside world. When the disciples saw Jesus standing before them in the upper room, they were astounded and overjoyed being in his loving presence. It was Jesus himself, nail scars in his hands and all, speaking to them. However, he looked different, too, mysteriously appearing suddenly before his friends in his resurrection body. Most importantly, his presence was unmistakable and comforting beyond description.

As Jesus met with his disciples, he got right down to business. He gave them a command and commissioned them to unlock their room and leave the house immediately. There was a ton of work for them to do in the world, and they needed to get going right away. This special encounter between Jesus and his disciples tells us something vitally important about the

character of God. Our God is a missionary God. He is in constant motion, and he wants us to be, too. The English word “mission” is derived from a Latin verb “misio,” which means “to send.” God wants to send us into the harvest fields to help him with his mission to announce the resurrection and to reconcile the whole world back to himself. For these purposes, God the Father sent his son to us and his son sent the Holy Spirit, and the three of them continue to send us into the world! Think about that for a moment.

The results of the current presidential and congressional elections in our country could easily lead us toward great animosity and suspicion among our friends and neighbors if we are not careful. Emotions in our country are at a high pitch right now, many fists up, heads cocked, ready to place blame on those who voted for candidates other than our own. In recent months, peaceful protests have led to racial wars and terrible looting, destruction, violence and even murder. The governor of Michigan was nearly kidnaped by white supremacists frustrated by her COVID-19 policies until the FBI stopped these marauders in their tracks. Greater insanity and similar acts of violence could easily continue in our country if we are not careful. Tribalism and self-pride are some of the most common tactics Satan uses to sow discourse, anarchy, and chaos among people.



In the summer of 1994, I was in Nakasongola, Uganda, with a church work group traveling from the Chicago area. One day, while we were working on a church building, we were told not to eat the fish we were being served at a local restaurant. At the time, dead human bodies were floating down the river to the south of us into Lake Victoria where the fish had been caught. The neighboring country of Rwanda was in the midst of horrific genocide. Hutus and Tutsis were killing each other over tribal disputes and centuries-old disagreements. We watched as Christian workers flooded into Uganda from Rwanda running through jungles on foot, scared for their lives. Through many tears and extreme sadness, these workers told us about neighbors killing neighbors in Rwanda, former friends murdering each other with machetes, and how they narrowly and miraculously escaped themselves. We could not believe what we were hearing. The entire experience opened my eyes to how easily anger and suspicion can lead to violence and murder. For these reasons, Jesus once said to his disciples, “You have heard that our ancestors were told, you must not murder. If you commit murder, you are subject to judgment. But I say, if you are even angry with someone, you are subject to judgment! If you call someone an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the court. And, if you curse someone, you are in danger of the fires of hell.” (Matthew 5:21-22)

Jesus wants to send us as peacemakers and bearers of his Good News. Often, God will send us into challenging areas and circumstances so that we can be his agents of reconciliation, healing, and grace. Followers of Jesus are serving a king who resides in a kingdom which is higher and mightier than any earthly kingdom. The Bible reminds us not to get lured into earthly battles which have the potential of compromising our walk with our Lord and allegiance to his higher set of values. When Jesus was talking with Pontus Pilate, knowing his life was on the line, our Lord modeled restraint, self-control, and an unshakable faith in that higher kingdom. We need these kinds of traits in America today if we are to avoid greater division and contention in our society. Successful politics, good and just governments alone, as incredibly important as they are, can never give us the peace, contentment, and satisfaction our hearts so constantly and earnestly seek as God’s creation. Only an unshakable faith in our Lord can achieve that goal. No one said it better than Jesus when he shared the following thoughts with Pilate; “My

kingdom is not an earthly kingdom. If it were, my followers would fight to keep me from being handed over to the Jewish leaders. But my Kingdom is not of this world...You would have no power over me at all unless it were given to you from above." (John 18:36,11a)

May none of us be Christians in name only. We need to be actively serving our Lord daily, especially now in a world which so desperately needs to know the path toward greater grace and peace. We all need to find our special callings and missions in life, leave the security of our own homes, and love our neighbors as ourselves. God wants to send us into our local neighborhoods and the world to bind up the wounded, care for the poor, and proclaim his Good News. Ask the Lord what he has in mind for you to do in our divided society today, whether it be to provide medical care for those whose lives are on the line, care for widows and orphans who are lonely, visit and encourage people in prison, teach Sunday School to children, provide clean water and affordable housing for economically challenged segments of our society, or become a peacemaker in your community for those who are being tempted to discriminate, unfairly judge, or retaliate against people different from themselves.



In whatever you do, don't stay huddled and scared in your room. Do it for the Lord's kingdom and may his "Peace be with you."