



# Sermon Growth Guide

**April 11, 2021**

**To Give His Life - Life Defeats Death**

**John 20:19-29**

**Key Verse:** John 20:20 “After (Jesus) said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.”

**Big Idea:** Jesus’ resurrection moves our hearts from fear to joy, giving us peace with God, hope for tomorrow and meaning for today..

## Foundations

What would your life look like if fear were the only word? Our Scripture this week begins with an awful picture: Jesus’ closest friends have locked themselves away in total fear that they will be killed next, and maybe even crucified. This is anti-life. It’s as if the disciples have already died. What is life if your whole existence is hiding in a room afraid to come out? Yet, metaphorically, so many of us either have been in a room like that or currently are in a room like that.

Enter Jesus. God is not dead, He’s alive! Fear flees and joy overwhelms our hearts. O, my heart, sing for joy to the Lord! And now, with our heart swelling to bursting with joy, we come to find out that God’s resurrection in Christ gives us peace, hope and meaning.

In Christ we have peace with God, one another, and with ourselves. In Christ, we have the hope of heaven that we too will be with the Lord forevermore. And in Christ, our each and every today explodes with meaning as we are called and empowered to join God in His mission of redemption to the ends of the earth (John 20:21-22).

Together with your circle, pray that God will use this time together to further heal you and equip you for the joyous mission to walk as the salt of the earth, the light of the world.

## Understanding God’s Word

Before Jesus came and stood among them, what was the emotional, physical and spiritual state of the disciples in verse 19?

What does Jesus say three times throughout our passage this week? (verses 19, 21 and 26)

What commissioning takes place in verses 21 and 22?

## Applying God’s Word

This week we ask our hearts to further understand that Jesus’ resurrection moves our hearts from fear to joy, giving us peace with God, hope for tomorrow and meaning for today. How much does the resurrection of Jesus affect your day-to-day decision making? Do you feel the joy, peace, hope and meaning that Christ gives you through His life?

## Witnessing God’s Word

How does the knowledge of the resurrection of Jesus shape your witness? How might your interactions change or your view of the importance of building trusting relationships with yet-believers deepen if Christ’s resurrection became even more of central importance to you?

Jesus came to give His life. But last Sunday, on Easter, we celebrated that this isn't the end of the story. Jesus' resurrection means that death no longer has the last word. As His Easter resurrection shadow lingers upon today's worship, we're reminded that even when loved ones die and we know we'll experience the same, life wins in the end because of what Christ has done. With this in mind, let's read John 20:19-29.

There's been a lot of talk lately about COVID vaccines. My Life Group's recent gatherings have included updates on who's gotten their shots. Our local newspaper publishes a daily chart of the percentage of our population that's been vaccinated. Perhaps you've noticed that people are out a bit more after getting their shots, starting to resume some of their previous activities. We're seeing more of you in worship than we did six months ago, though many more are still more comfortable worshipping from home. Travel is also picking up; I'm looking forward to visiting my mom next month for the first time in 15 months.

These vaccinations are impacting our lives for good in multiple ways. But make no mistake: Jesus' resurrection is an even greater game changer in its impact upon our lives. The difference it made for Christ's followers is obvious in today's passage. Jesus' resurrection brought new meaning to their lives, changed their perspective, and gave them

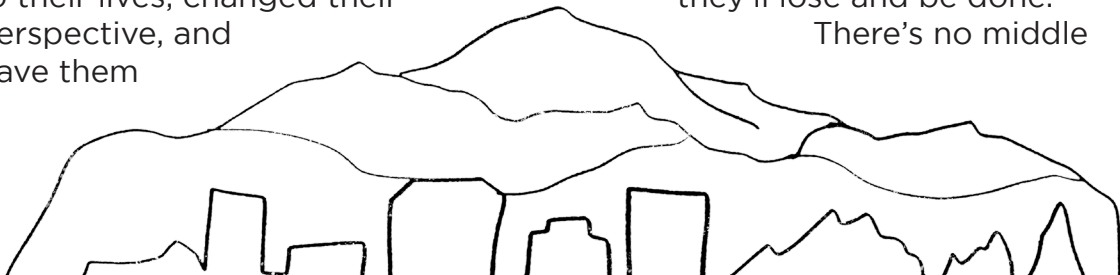
new hope. It can do the same for us today.

As we explore our opening verses, I invite you to ask two questions: what were Jesus' disciples feeling, and why? John tells us, **“On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews ... ” (John 20:19a).**

What were the disciples feeling? John offers a firsthand account, telling us they were fearful of the Jewish leaders. Though the doors were locked to keep out this threat, the room within was filled with fear. Hours earlier, Mary Magdalene had excitedly described her interaction with Jesus after His resurrection. But even the remarkable news she shared couldn't pierce the fear they felt.

Why were the disciples fearful? That answer seems equally easy: their lives were threatened. Jewish leaders had taken out their leader, and they were likely the next target. But let's go a little deeper and consider another factor that was surely fueling the disciples' fear: their hopes and dreams had been crushed with Jesus' death. They didn't know what to do or how to move forward. There's a poker phrase “all in” that describes players who put all their chips in the pot. One of two things will happen as a result: they're either going to win the pot, or they'll lose and be done.

There's no middle



ground. The disciples went all in with Jesus; they'd staked their lives and their futures on Him and what He was doing. Now they had nothing to show for it, no future to look forward to. That would be enough to paralyze anyone within.

It's important to understand this so we can fully appreciate what happened next: **“Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you!’ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw him. Again Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.’ And with that he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven’” (John 20:19b–23).**

Let me ask again: What were the disciples feeling, in response? They were overjoyed. The Greek word used here means to “rejoice.” That’s an extraordinary shift from the fear consuming them just moments earlier. It’s also one Jesus had predicted before His death, when He told the disciples: **“Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy” (John 16:22).**

Now let’s consider why these disciples were overjoyed. The obvious answer is that their friend and leader was with them once again. But again, there was a deeper element to this feeling: Jesus’ appearance confirmed that what He’d promised was true. The disciples had gone all in, and

they suddenly discovered that their losing hand was actually the winning one! Their lives were radically changed by what Jesus had done.

However, this realization wasn’t shared by all of Jesus’ disciples. John tells us: **“Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, ‘We have seen the Lord!’”**

**But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”**

**A week later His disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”**

**Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:24–28).**

Thomas had declared earlier in John 11 that he’d accompany Jesus even if it meant going to his death. In John 14, Thomas wasn’t afraid to admit that he didn’t understand what Jesus was telling the disciples. Here, he basically says seeing is believing; this news was too extraordinary to accept on the say-so of others.

Jesus’ response to Thomas a week later is instructive. He could have challenged Thomas

about his lack of faith, but didn't. Instead, He stooped to where Thomas was, inviting him to see and touch His wounds as Thomas had demanded. This is a wonderful reminder that our Lord also stoops to where we are in moments of spiritual uncertainty. Rather than become impatient with questions that frequently impede our faith, Jesus meets us where we are and patiently helps us move from doubt to belief, as He did with Thomas.

Once again, we see the changing power of Jesus' resurrection. Thomas pivoted from skepticism to a personal profession of faith, declaring Jesus as his Lord and God. His response prompted Jesus' closing words, **"Then Jesus told him, 'Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not yet seen and yet have believed'" (John 20:29).**

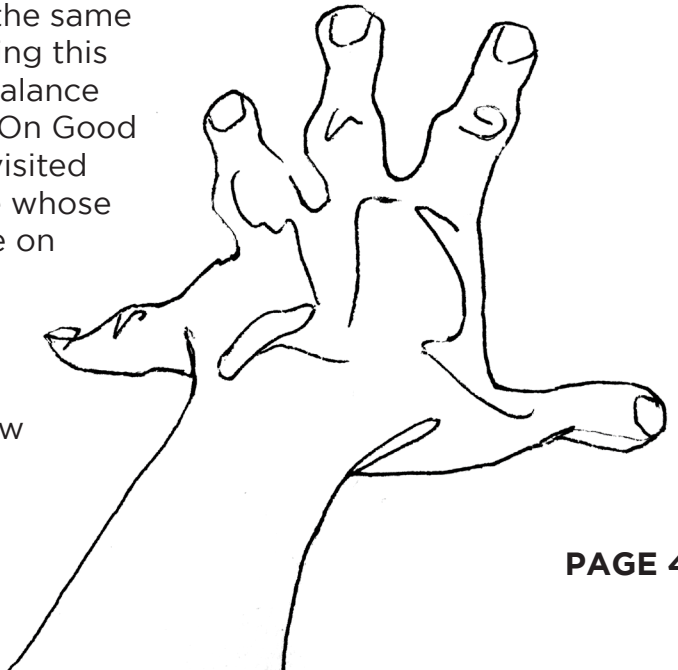
Can you see yourself in this part of the story? We're the ones Jesus is talking about here! We've not seen Him in the flesh, as the disciples did, and are left to trust in faith the accounts of those who've gone before us. When we're responsive to God's wooing love and declare that Jesus is our Lord and God, He assures us that we'll be blessed.

What does this blessing look like? First, **we have peace with God.** Three times in today's text (John 20:19, 21), Jesus declared to His disciples, "Peace be with you." This was a standard Hebrew greeting in those days, but these words carried an even deeper meaning coming from Jesus. He

was also describing the lasting peace with God that He gave His life for on the cross doesn't change from day to day.

How often do we find ourselves falling short of who we'd like to be or how we wish we'd lived out our day? These moments of honesty provide a glimpse of how much more we fall short of a holy God's desires of us. Here's the thing: God takes us back every day. Every day! What Jesus did for us on the cross impacts our relationship with God more than our goodness ever can. Are you experiencing ongoing, unrelenting peace with God that Jesus brought about? I hope you are.

Second, **we have hope for tomorrow.** A few weeks ago our Lead Pastor Tim used a beautiful phrase: heaven hope. Our heaven hope anchors us in confidence that death isn't the end—that the best is still to come. It shapes our perspective by reminding us of a bigger story than the one we often only see in the present moment. I see this most clearly when I'm with families grieving a loved one's approaching death, while at the same time feeling this counterbalance of hope. On Good Friday I visited someone whose time here on earth is nearly done. When I asked how she was handling this, do



you know what she said to me? “I win.” I win! Only with the hope Christ provides can we say such a thing in the face of death.

Both the Old and New Testaments declare, “Where is death’s victory? Where is death’s sting?” Yes, death does bring a sting—but because of what Christ has done, we’re filled with hope that it won’t be a permanent one. Does what Jesus has done for you impact your outlook on life, and the hope you have? I hope it does.

Finally, **we have meaning today**. If we were to fast forward a few weeks beyond today’s passage, we’d find the disciples defying the very leaders they were fearful of here. Jesus’ resurrection didn’t simply provide death benefits; it changed their lives from that point on. The larger story of what He had done and is doing couldn’t help but impact their smaller daily story.

Jesus invites us to find meaning and purpose each day in what He’s done for us. To understand that the same power that defeated death is at work in our lives and our world today. To allow our life story to be influenced less by the daily details, and more by the larger story of what Jesus has done and is doing. Does Jesus’ loving presence and activity shape the purpose and meaning of your days? I hope it does.

In a few moments we’ll read the names of those in our faith community who we’ve lost since we were last together the Sunday after Easter two years ago. As we do so, we gratefully celebrate their

years on earth, and how God used them to touch our lives. We’re also affirming our joyful belief that through Christ, life has defeated death, and these individuals are now experiencing new life. If you don’t know many of the names, allow this to be a personal time of remembering others who’ve played a significant role in your life, who you miss today.

I can’t end without sharing these words from John Eldridge describing that moment when we move from death to life:

**“Whatever physical affliction you have known, whatever your limitations have been, everything old age will eventually strip you of—it will all be washed away. Your renewed body will be like the body of Jesus. We will burst forth into the new creation like children let out for summer break.”**

What a beautiful image of entering eternity with God! We’ll be like children excitedly racing out into summer vacation! That’s the experience of our loved ones who have gone before us. That will one day be our experience as well, as we believe and are blessed. Amen.

