

Welcome

Have you tried to answer a little kid's question? It'll probably be one of the most difficult things that you can do. My son would ask me questions when he was little and it was crazy where some of our discussions went. It would seem like an easy question, and I would give a response. My response would be replied with a "but, why?" or a "but, how?" My response did not make sense to him.

When my son was two or three he fell and got a cut on his head. It was bleeding a little and I applied pressure to help stop the bleeding. When the bleeding stopped, my son asked how the bleeding stopped. I thought to myself, "I know the answer! I took a few biology and hematology classes." I explained to him that we have platelets in our body that go to the area that is bleeding along with a protein called fibrin to form a protective barrier. He asked, "but how does it know what to do?" My response was, "the platelets release something to help begin the clotting factor." No matter my response it was responded with, "how?" I gave up and finally grabbed a band aid and said it's like this band aid. I see where the injury is, I cleaned it, and I am going to cover your owie with a bandaid. That's kind of what your body does from the inside. He said okay, chose his bandaid, and ran off to play.

I learned quickly that I had to change my communication style with my son. This helped me understand the communication process and how even in our conversations the messages we send are encoded and the recipient needs to decode what we say to make meaning of it.

If I tried to explain something my son didn't understand, I would need to repeat myself a few times to help him understand. It was vice versa as well - he would explain things to me until I understood what he meant. It's very kind for kids to be patient enough to explain things to us adults.

Words and messages need to be decoded. That's the process of communication. Maybe we don't know the language and we have to decipher what is being said. Maybe we just have to learn to hear each other - every relationship requires healthy communication and communication is a skill. It's something we can learn. It can be frustrating if communication is not understood - or if something is misinterpreted, it causes a break in the conversation.

The same is true for faith. We learn to communicate with God. John's gospel tells how Jesus continually changed his posture to a shepherd and focused on the flock - Jesus's communication was a caring and loving shepherd who intended to properly guide them to fully understand his words. I changed my ways of communicating for my son to understand. God changed communication with us so that we could understand God. After Jesus' resurrection, we see how

God speaks to us, and learn to hear Jesus' good news for our world. If we learn to listen to Jesus, we hear how he invites us into the heart of God's love for us.

Message

We just celebrated Easter, when Jesus was raised from the dead. Here at Catalyst, we celebrate the resurrection not as a cool thing that happened that one time, but as an ongoing reality in which we all get to participate. Jesus' resurrection is the beginning of a new creation, a new reality that is coming into being all around us. We can learn to see this new reality breaking through the old through Jesus himself. By giving us the Holy Spirit to live within and among us, Jesus enables us to see and participate in God's new world.

That's why our series is called DECODER RING. Jesus enables us to discern what would otherwise be hidden to us.

Easter today is different from the very first Easter. Easter today is a joyous and celebratory occasion. Our music is joyful - we sing about Jesus overcoming death - we celebrate that Jesus is the risen Savior. Our churches are usually decorated for Easter - we have flowers, Easter lilies that adorn the church spaces and even our homes. There are pretty crosses that we display to acknowledge Jesus' victory over death. There might also be an Easter dinner we share.

Turn with us to [John 20](#).

The first Easter was not a celebration - it did not have choirs, happy crowds dressed in their best religious attire, pretty spring decorations, or even a celebratory meal. The disciples, Jesus followers, or Jewish people did not sing an old hymn like, He Lives - "I serve a risen Saviour, He's in the world today, I know that He is living, whatever men may say." Nope. Easter was not a joyous celebration. The hope of a Savior faded away as Jesus was executed by the Roman Empire. Even with Jesus announcing his death and resurrection-those who heard were clueless. After Jesus' death, three days later, Mary goes to Jesus' tomb and does not find Jesus' corpse. She was crying thinking someone took Jesus' body.

When all seems bleak, faith was probably at the lowest point - it felt like the empire won. Jesus all of a sudden appeared to Mary and told her to announce to the disciples that she had seen Jesus. It's ironic that even after Mary proclaims Jesus' resurrection to the disciples - the disciples still did not believe or were hopeful to what was proclaimed to them - they were still afraid for their lives. The disciples were behind locked doors.

Let's read together what happened that first Easter evening, **"That Sunday evening the disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Suddenly, Jesus was standing there among them! "Peace be with you," he said. As he spoke, he showed**

them the wounds in his hands and his side. They were filled with joy when they saw the Lord!” (John:19-20, New Living Translation - NLT)

The disciples had the doors shut for safety, they feared for their life. What does it mean when you have your doors locked? Does that mean you want someone to easily enter?

Even with the doors locked - Jesus enters the room where the disciples were hiding. Jesus appeared to his disciples and gave a Jewish greeting, “Peace be with you.” What seems like a bleak story where people are hiding, they’re gathered in their safe space where they control who can enter or not. Jesus comes to the cowering disciples and starts to make things different. Jesus spoke the words, “Peace be with you.” Jesus spoke words against the disciples' circumstances - circumstances that had the disciples protecting themselves behind locked doors. Jesus then shows the disciples his wounds and finally the disciples were filled with joy.

Has there been a time when you have been fearful? What could be done to bring you peace?



When I was in elementary school on the Navajo Reservation, there were certain times of the year starting mid-October, the Yeibicheis would come to our schools for offerings. Yeibecheis are masked dancers for specific Navajo religious ceremonies. It was actually scary for us kids. You knew the Yeibicheis were coming when you heard the bells on their ceremonial clothing. The masks they wore were kind of scary to us kids as well. We’d have to make sure that around that time we had food offerings to

give them - but sometimes they would still chase us. One time my little friends and I were soooo scared that we hid in the bathroom. Our teacher came in to check on us while we were huddled in a bathroom stall and gave us comforting words that she would protect us. Whatever words she spoke brought us peace because we stopped crying. I don’t know what would have happened if our teacher wasn’t there to keep us safe and speak words of peace to us. To this day I cannot hear jingle bells, like the ones around Christmas without being freaked out.

The word peace means so much. Peace or shalom was understood as a sense of well-being for self, community and creation - peace is an active act to bring reconciliation and overcome enmity that exists in the world. Peace spoken to one another is a word of assurance where circumstances or things that counter peace will not prevail. Peace speaks something positive against the negative circumstances we may be in.

The disciples went from fearful and probably anxious to the complete opposite of being filled with joy - everything switches from the empire of death and control to the story of hope and life once Jesus enters the room.

To speak words of peace is not where we stop as Jesus followers. John purposely tells us of the disciples seeing Jesus. In the time of despair, the disciples recognize the one person they could not keep dead, Jesus. Let us sing of Easter which reveals God's love through Jesus that bears the gift of life, hope, and peace.

Song

The place behind locked doors is not where we are to enjoy Jesus' presence. Jesus calls his disciples from behind locked doors and sends them off on a mission. After the disciples rejoiced in seeing Jesus, "Again [Jesus] said, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you." Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." (John 20:21-23, New Living Translation - NLT)

Fear keeps us content and we're okay behind the security of the locked doors. We're okay with the empire thinking that they've won and killed Jesus. It was important for the disciples to see Jesus most likely for their faith. It was also important for them to see Jesus to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and the commissioning to carry on the work of Jesus. The Holy Spirit is the spirit of truth that decodes and reveals who God is through Jesus. The Holy Spirit guides us and does not trick or confuse. How did the disciples respond? Jesus continually communicated with the disciples until they were able to hear and understand Jesus.

Jesus tells us again, "peace be with you" and provides new instructions, as God has sent Jesus, so Jesus sends us. What does it mean to be sent? The author, John, writes this instruction so we can reflect back on Jesus' entire earthly ministry. What stands out to you about Jesus' earthly ministry? Why did God send Jesus? John 3:17 tells us, "God sent [Jesus] into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him." Jesus literally breathes on the disciples and gives the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus commissions the disciples for what he was sent here for - not to judge the world, but to save the world by carrying out the same ministry he did to heal, reconcile, and break the cycle of injustice. Jesus calls us to a ministry of forgiveness not condemnation. It is significant that Jesus directs the disciples to forgive anyone's sins. The early church understood that the church community would be a place of forgiveness and the act of forgiving is a communal action. The early church preserved Jesus' words and what he did in this world in the Gospels. The narratives of Jesus' life teaches us and reminds us of his life, death, and resurrection.

The world is already unforgiving - we often experience the world as difficult, hostile, unequal, broken.

The world Jesus ushers in is that of forgiveness - we are called to flip the unforgiving world and to break the powers that bring fear and death. John's writing has in mind a group of people or a community to work towards forgiveness and peace. This commissioning is not for one person to take up on their own. It takes a community who has received the Holy Spirit to be faithful in carrying on Jesus' ministry.

I wish I could say that I always fully understand what Jesus is saying. Maybe it's because of the desire to filter what I want to hear out of God's Living Word - Jesus. Maybe I trivialize and complicate God's word to where the act of carrying out God's message of love becomes complicated. Maybe I don't take God's word seriously. We respond hesitantly to Jesus' words. Jesus' response to us is the sending of the Holy Spirit to be our decoder.

God creates time for us to listen quietly and obediently to the words of Jesus. If we obey the words of Jesus it leads to liberation and peace.

Easter season is a time to ponder the words of Jesus. Easter season is a reminder of who we are as Jesus followers. Jesus tells us three times, "Peace be with you."

Isn't that a message we need today? Our world is torn by hostilities, from the ongoing war in Ukraine to school shootings to the continuing struggle for racial justice. It's so much easier to shut the doors to our homes and sanctuaries, to put our fingers in our ears and sing our worship songs loudly enough to drown out the news. To pray as a way to bury our heads in the sand and ignore the pain in our communities and in our own lives.

But we live on the other side of Easter. So Jesus appears inside our locked doors and says, "Peace be with you." Shalom be with you. We have Jesus' peace with us and should not be fearfully hiding behind locked doors for our safety. Jesus gives the church the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is active and present so we can continue the work of forgiveness.

What does it look like for you to receive Jesus' peace this week? What does it look like for you to be an ambassador of God's forgiveness?

Just as we received God's gift of life, may we carry on the work of Jesus and bear witness of the life he brings to all people.

Communion + Examen

When in the last week have I experienced Jesus' peace?

When in the last week have I practiced forgiveness?

How can I be a model of God's forgiveness in the week ahead?
Where do I need to receive Jesus' peace this week?