

Acts 4:32-35  
Psalm 133  
1 John 1:1 – 2:2  
John 20:19-31

## Sermon April 7<sup>th</sup>, 2024

### *Jesus Brings Us Together as Community*

As many of you know, I have an unusual fear of balloons. I don't know why that is. It could be the loud noise a balloon makes when it pops, or the unpredictability of when the balloon might pop. Maybe I have some repressed memory of some negative childhood experience with balloons that created this fear response in me. Whatever the reason, it is an annoying fear to have.

I think of my four wonderful children who have been deprived of having balloons at their birthday parties, because I would be too on edge when seeing the kids' hit the balloons towards our popcorn ceiling. Or when seeing the kids try to bite the balloons.

Sometimes I have isolated myself from opportunities to gather with others, because of this fear. I have actually avoided parties with friends and family in the past over this fear. If I see a picture of a balloon on an invitation, there is no way I am going to that party.

Another time I was with the family eating at East Side Marios. Enjoying my pizza dish. When a clown came into the restaurant and started making these balloon animals for the children there. Yeah. I know. How dare they? I remember rushing Erin and the kids to finish eating so we could get out of there.

Have you ever felt isolated, because a fear prevented you from gathering with community?

In my interfaith work, I work with a lot of people within the Muslim and Jewish faith traditions. Both have dealt with a lot of antisemitism and islamophobia over the years. More so lately, due to what's happening overseas. Unfortunately, some of my friends from these two faith traditions have suffered from feelings of isolation, because they fear going out to community events. Due to having to experience another person saying or doing hateful things to them.

Have you ever felt isolated, because a fear prevented you from gathering with community?

Many of us can think back to 2022 when things really started opening up again, and how hard it was to gather as a community, because we still feared COVID, as well as, feared our neighbours, as there was a lot of anger some people were feeling from some of the restrictions that the government had set in place during the early days of

the pandemic. As well people who were angry at those who didn't follow these restrictions.

Have you ever felt isolated, because a fear prevented you from gathering with community?

In our gospel, the disciples are afraid that they will suffer the same fate as Jesus, and so hide out. Instead, of continuing the work of Jesus in the community, building relationships, gathering as community. They are too afraid. They become isolated.

Have you ever felt isolated, because a fear prevented you from gathering with community?

Well, in the midst of the disciples' feelings of isolation, in the midst of their fears, the resurrected Christ visits them, and shares words of peace with them. To calm them from their anxiety and fear. As well as to invite them back into community.

The sharing the peace greeting is a very important communal greeting in the early church to reiterate for the people the importance of gathering as community.

This is why Jesus repeats this greeting to the disciples. To encourage them not to let their fears stop them from their calling as God's people to gather as community. Their calling as God's people to proclaim the gospel as community. To be Christ's hands and feet in the world as community.

When Thomas comes home, and finds out he missed out on this visit, he struggles to walk with the disciples back into community. He still lives with these fears and anxieties. Feeling isolated not only from the wider community, but also now from his inner community.

So, the resurrected Christ comes back a week later, and meets up with Thomas, and once again shares this greeting of peace. To calm him from his fear and anxiety, and, to bring him back into community with his siblings in Christ.

In fact, this is what Jesus does throughout his ministry. He helps people reconnect with community. He comes into their lives, calms them from their fears and anxieties, heals them, so that they will be welcomed back into the community.

Do you remember a time where Jesus did something through some means to calm your heart from your fears and anxiety. To bring you back into community?

For example, you are feeling really anxious and scared about something, and so, find a quiet place to pray. And in the midst of this prayer, you hear Christ's calming voice. You are reminded of God's peaceful presence.

Or you come across a story in the Bible that empowers you to heal, to reconnect with your community.

Or God sends someone into your life to help support you, as you try and overcome your fears.

Or God sends someone into your life to help in your healing by loving you as Christ loves. Helping you reconnect with community. Helping you get up and go to church again after years of being away due to some past hurt.

Do you remember a time where Jesus did something through some means to calm your heart from your fears and anxiety. To bring you back into community?

As the church today, we continue to gather regularly, sharing these words of peace with one another, calming each other's hearts through this greeting. Reiterating the importance for us to gather as community through this greeting. To proclaim the gospel as community. To be Jesus' hands and feet in the world as community.

Do you remember a time where Jesus did something through some means to calm your heart from your fears and anxiety. To bring you back into community?

Let us pray, loving God, when our fears and anxieties isolate us, calm our hearts, give us peace, and gather us back to be in community together. **Amen.**

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