

Bible Notes for Small Groups WB 28th April 2024

The Upper Room

We are looking at encounters with Jesus after His resurrection. We have looked at Jesus meeting Mary at the garden tomb, Peter and John running to the empty tomb and now we look at hope amidst anxiety by focussing on the disciples in the upper room.

John 20:19-22

This reading shows the disciples afraid and in hiding in the same place where they shared the last supper. They have locked the doors because they are fearful of the Roman authorities finding them and fearing they would be next to die. So it's not surprising they are afraid and have locked themselves away. They are probably incredibly anxious. They are also grieving the loss of their friend and mentor. For three years they have had the gift of their teacher and friend with them, and in one moment that is all gone! Do you resonate with some of this? You may have once thought all was lost and God had abandoned you.

Then Jesus appeared in the middle of them. They thought He was dead. Luke's gospel tells us 'They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost' They may have heard the women saying they had met with Jesus but did they believe them? We are not sure.

- What is the first thing Jesus did? Why do you think He did that first?

Next Jesus readily gave proof that it was really Him by showing them His wounds. In other parts of the Gospels we see Him doing that again for Thomas who was not with the other disciples when Jesus first appeared. Even after showing the proof of His wounds He wanted them to have no doubts that He had been dead and had risen from death so He repeats Himself. He needs the disciples to be sure of His resurrection power. This is His complete victory for them and for us. Our faith in Him is precious because we have not seen what they see but we still profess Him as Risen Saviour and Lord. What He said to them He also says to us.

PEACE BE WITH YOU

In fact He says it several times.

- Take a couple of minutes in quiet. Sit comfortably. Close your eyes. Breathe regularly. In your mind receive the peace that Jesus is offering you.
- Now make sure that if you do not already regularly do that little exercise, begin to do it every day just for a couple of minutes. It is something you can then also call on in times of stress.

There are three points to make.....

1 It's ok to feel anxiety or fear

The fact that Jesus cried out in distress in the garden and on the cross underlines that. We are only human so Jesus said: “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33) He meets the disciples in their place of fear and He will do the same for us.

- Have you ever been faced with a frightening situation? What did you do?
- Is there anyone in the group who can give testimony of how God has helped them through fear or anxiety?

2 We can allow our anxiety to point us to Jesus

If we stay in our fear and anxiety it can paralyse us. We can allow our anxiety or fear to bring us closer to Jesus or to bring us down. The disciples became filled with joy when they saw Him. We need to physically lift our heads and look up and turn towards Him.

Psalm 61:1-3

This Psalm was written by David at a time when he was under deep threat and fear of his life. David is one of the big heroes in the Old Testament. He stood up to the giant Goliath when the whole Hebrew army was too terrified to fight him. Because his trust was in God, he was able not only to confront the enemy but to defeat and kill him.

Even though David had been brave against Goliath, here we see him crying out to God to help him in this new threatening situation. He has the presence of mind to remember that God is the source of our protection when we are in need of it so long as we place ourselves in His hands.

- Look again at the psalm. Can you pick out the key words and phrases that show how David places his trust in God? Is there a situation at the moment where this will be helpful to you?

3 Jesus breathes life into them.

In Genesis 2:7 we see that God breathed the breath of life into the first man. And now Jesus breathes the breath of the Holy Spirit into His disciples. The Holy Spirit is the life force of God. Jesus promised the disciples before His passion and death that once He had finished His work God would send the Holy Spirit. Here we see the first signs of that and it doesn't stop there. It continues throughout history. He can do it for us today.

- How are we helped, in practical situations, by having the breath of the Holy Spirit breathed into us?

Our anxiety and fear can feel like a locked room and render us powerless, when we are threatened, when we are sick or in distress. - Corona virus has shown us how powerless we actually are. Even people in power like the Prime Minister at the time, were rendered powerless through it.

God chooses many ways to heal us. Some people may have chemical imbalances and may need medication for that. That's ok

When we were younger there was a debate about whether one should take medication or allow Jesus to heal people. One minister said "If the doctors have given you medication, pray over it, thank God for it and take it"

As we consider the John reading again, we can be reminded that Jesus can bring us peace even when we are in hiding, in panic, in fear, in anxiety or any kind of distress. Even in the upper room with the doors locked He had no trouble standing in their midst and breathing His life into them. Take comfort and encouragement from that. Be blessed.