



# Believe

JOHN

MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

## Examining the text & our hearts:

19 When it was evening on that first day of the week, the disciples were gathered together with the doors locked because they feared the Jews. Jesus came, stood among them, & said to them, “Peace be with you.” 20 Having said this, he showed them his hands & his side. So the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, I also send you.” 22 After saying this, he breathed on them & said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” (Jn. 20:19-23)

### 1. Jesus Appears on the Night of his Resurrection to All his Disciples (Jn. 20:19-20)

- a. The accepted narrative until John wrote: ‘Only the apostles were commissioned by Jesus’ (Matt. 28:16, 19-20; Acts 1:2-3, 8; 1 Cor. 15:7)
  - a. “In the Last Supper scene in John, those who are with Jesus are his ‘disciples,’ a term used over 70 times in this Gospel for all who are taught by & believe in Jesus. In contrast, Mark says it was the Twelve who were at table with Jesus (Mk. 14:17); Matthew says the twelve disciples (Mt. 26:20); in Luke, it is ‘the apostles’ (Lk. 22:14), whom Luke always identifies with the Twelve (Lk. 6:13; 9:1 with 9:10).” (Barbara E. Reid, *At the Table of Holy Wisdom*, p. 3)
  - b. “It is significant that the Fourth Gospel is not specific in stating exactly who was present. Luke had indicated that Peter & the Eleven (Acts 2:14) were recipients of the Spirit but, by the turn of the first Christian century (90s CE) when the Johannine author wrote, the Twelve were dead & the community understood that the Spirit of Jesus abided with each of them...Hence the Fourth Evangelist refers simply to ‘the disciples’ (20:19, 20). The Christians of the first century CE knew themselves to be infused...by the same Spirit as...their ancestors in the faith.” (P. D. Sanchez, *Word We Celebrate*, p. 183)
- b. To the larger group of disciples, including the apostles
  - a. “It is important to note that these verses identify those gathered together with the general term ‘disciples’. They are never identified as the Eleven, & it is a mistake to read this gathering of disciples [as] the more closed notion of the Twelve...The Fourth Evangelist rarely speaks of the Twelve (6:67, 70-71; 20:24). The gathering of the disciples in vv. 19-23...probably included the core group, but there is no indication that it was limited to them.” (Gail O’Day, *The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary: John*, p. 725)
  - b. “The Fourth Evangelist rarely uses the term ‘the Twelve’ to speak of the disciples & never identifies them as ‘the Eleven,’ so at this juncture [20:19] they are simply identified [as]... ‘disciples.’ This gathering of disciples...probably included the core group, but there is no indication that it was limited to them. For John, the gathering on Easter

evening represents the faith community in general, not the apostolic leadership.” (Robert P. Vande Kappelle, Truth Revealed, p. )

- c. “When the risen Jesus comes to the disciples & pours out the Spirit on them, the Twelve are not mentioned, but ‘the disciples’ are [20:19-20]. That is no accident. The saying of Jesus: ‘As the Father sent me, so I send you’ [20:21] makes all the disciples apostles, turns them into ones who are sent...What is expressed by the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is very strongly emphasized in this passage: there is a *successio apostolica* [Latin: ‘apostolic succession’], but all believers belong to that succession...The modern reader usually thinks of the Twelve in connection with this scene. But John says nothing of the kind; he... speaks only generally of ‘the disciples’... The Fourth Evangelist wrote his Gospel afresh for his own time as just such a disciple.” (E. Haenchen, John, Vol. 2, p. 216)
  - c. “Peace to you!”
    - a. “‘Peace be with you’ is a conventional greeting (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:3), but it has an additional function in v. 19. With these words, Jesus fulfills another of his promises from the Farewell Discourse: the gift of his peace (14:27). This peace is given to a community who will experience the world’s hatred & persecution (15:18-25).” (Gail O’Day, Op Cit, p. 726)
    - b. “‘Peace be with you’...After forsaking Jesus at the time of the arrest the disciples may well have expected rebuke or blame. Instead Jesus pronounces peace on them.” (Leon Morris, Op. Cit, p. 744)
  - d. Jesus shows them his pierced hands & side (v. 20)
    - a. “Jesus’ presentation of his hands & side in v. 20 is similar to his self-presentation in Luke 24:38-40...[H]is displaying his body to them underscores the continuity between the earthly & the risen Jesus.” (Gail O’Day, Op. Cit, p. 726)
  - e. The disciples rejoice
    - a. “It is not until after Jesus shows the disciples his hands & side that they rejoice. The disciples’ joy...is the fulfillment of Jesus’ promise in 16:20-22 that the disciples’ pain will turn to joy when they see him again.” (Gail O’Day, Op. Cit, p. 726)
    - b. “[Jesus’ promise of joy & peace (14:27; 16:20-22)] is realized when he gives the disciples the Spirit, peace, & joy after the resurrection (Jn. 20:19-23).” (Craig Koester, The Word of Life: A Theology of John’s Gospel, p. 134)
2. Jesus Commissions All his Disciples to Continue What He Did on Earth (Jn. 20:21)
- a. “Jesus’ words in v. 21b are a direct echo of his prayer at 17:18. The syntax of both verses clearly positions the Father’s sending of Jesus as an analogue for Jesus’ sending of the community. Jesus...commissions the faith community to continue the work God sent him to do.” (Gail O’Day, Op. Cit, p. 726)
  - b. “Jesus gives the disciples the Spirit along with this commission: ‘As the Father has sent me, so I send you’ (Jn. 20:21)...The passage makes Jesus’ sending of the disciples analogous to the Father’s sending of Jesus.” (Craig Koester, Op. Cit, p. 158)
  - c. “Jesus calls people out of the world & into the faith community, then sends them back into the world...in order to call others to faith.” (Craig Koester, Op. Cit, p. 209)
3. Jesus Empowers All his Disciples to Continue What He Did on Earth (Jn. 20:22-23)
- a. “By sending...the Spirit, Jesus...empower[s] his followers to bear witness to the world (20:22).” (Craig Koester, Op. Cit, p. 136)
  - b. He breathes on all his disciples (v. 22)
    - a. “[Breathed on them]’...The giving of the Spirit is...to be understood as Jesus’ equipping of the disciples for the work assigned to them.” (Herman Ridderbos, A Theological Commentary, John, p. 460)
    - b. “...this giving of the Spirit [is an] empowerment for the disciples’ ‘mission’ (Herman Ridderbos, Op. Cit, p. 460)
    - c. “Jesus’ breathing on the disciples is explicitly linked with his words in v. 21 ‘when he had said this...’, so that the gift of the Spirit is presented as that which empowers the community to continue Jesus’ work. The Spirit was promised for the time after Jesus’ glorification (7:37-39), & at v. 22 that moment has arrived.” (Gail O’Day, Op. Cit, p. 726)
    - d. “Jesus bestowed on them the equipment they would need for the discharge of their commission...John is not writing as though there were a series of gifts made to individuals. Rather he speaks of a collective gift made to the group as a whole. ‘The gift was once for all, not to individuals but to the abiding body’ (Westcott).” (Leon Morris, Op. Cit, p. 746)
  - c. He authorizes them to forgive & retain sins (v. 23)
    - a. Verse 23 has a controversial role in church history
      - a. “The commissioning scene closes with Jesus’ words about forgiving & retaining sins. This is a very complex verse to interpret. Its vocabulary is unusual for the Fourth Gospel; this is the only occurrence of the verbs ‘to forgive’ & ‘to retain’ in the Gospel... This verse has a controversial role in the history of the church, as church leaders have debated its significance for the practices of baptism & penance. For example, it was a crucial text in the Council of Trent’s defense of the sacrament of penance & the role of ordained clergy in granting absolution from sins, & it is often used in discussions of the relationship between rituals of repentance & the right of baptism.” (Gail O’Day, Op. cit, p. 726)

- b. "This passage has been related in various ways to the practices of contemporary churches. Some assume that the disciples represent the clergy, who are charged with forgiving & retaining sins." (Craig Koester, Op. Cit, p. 158)
  - b. It's critical that verse 23 be read in its Johannine context
    - a. "It is critical in the interpretation of v. 23, therefore, that this verse be heard in its Johannine context & not be read anachronistically through the lens of the Reformation." (Gail O'Day, Op. cit, p. 726)
      - a. These words are addressed to 'all' Jesus' disciples not to the apostles only
        - a. "Jesus' words...are addressed to the entire faith community, not to its apostolic leaders. Any discussion of this verse, therefore, must be grounded in an understanding of forgiveness of sins as the work of the entire community." (Gail O'Day, Op. cit, p. 726)
      - b. Forgiving & retaining sins has to be seen as the Spirit-empowered mission of all disciples
        - a. "...the community's enactment of Jesus' words...depends on both Jesus' words of sending (v. 21) & the gift of the Holy Spirit (v. 22). The forgiveness of sins must be understood as the Spirit-empowered mission of continuing Jesus' work in the world." (Gail O'Day, Op. Cit, p. 727)
      - c. These words must be interpreted in terms of Jesus' teaching on sin in John
        - a. "[A]lthough vocabulary of forgiveness & retaining is foreign to John, sin is not. Because the community's work is an extension of Jesus' work, v. 23 must be interpreted in terms of Jesus' teaching & actions about sin...In John, sin is a theological failing, not a moral or behavioral transgression. To have sin is to be blind to the revelation of God in Jesus...Jesus commissions the community to continue the work of making God in Jesus known in the world & thereby to bring the world to the moment of decision & judgment with regard to sin." (Gail O'Day, Op. Cit, p. 727)
        - b. "Surprisingly, John does not picture Jesus forgiving sins during the course of his ministry as the other Gospels do. Instead, attention centers on the crucifixion, which removes sin...His crucifixion is designed to bring change, to alter a situation defined by sin. In this gospel sin is unbelief & the actions that come from it. Sin is taken away when unbelief is removed & people are restored to relationship with God." (Craig Koester, Op. Cit, p. 158)
        - c. "Sins...show alienation from God & ultimately lead to death, the ultimate separation from God (8:24)...The disciples bring release from sins by communicating the love of God that Jesus has conveyed..." (Craig Koester, Op. Cit, pp. 158-9)
        - d. "The expressions they are forgiven & it is withheld both represent perfect-tense verbs in Greek & could also be translated, 'they have been forgiven' & 'it has been withheld,' since the perfect gives the sense of completed past action with continuing results in the present. The idea is not that individual Christians or churches have authority on their own to forgive or not forgive people, but rather that as the church proclaims the gospel message of forgiveness of sins in the power of the Holy Spirit, it proclaims that those who believe in Jesus have their sins forgiven, & that those who do not believe in him do not have their sins forgiven—which simply reflects what God in heaven has already done." (ESV Study Bible)
    - c. By revealing God to the world
      - a. "The combination of vv. 22-23 suggests that the faith community is to be a people shaped by Jesus' gift of the Spirit & that the mark of that gift will be the power to forgive or retain sins...[F]orgiving sins does not involve forgiving moral transgressions, but it involves bearing witness to the identity of God as revealed in Jesus. If the interpreter combines vv. 22-23 with Jesus' commandment to love one another (13:34-35), a possible picture of the church's mission emerges. By loving one another as Jesus loves, the faith community reveals God to the world; by revealing God to the world, the church makes it possible for the world to choose to enter into relationship with this God of limitless love. It is in choosing or rejecting this relationship with God that sins are forgiven or retained. The faith community's mission, therefore, is not to be the arbiter of right or wrong, but to bear unceasing witness to the love of God in Jesus." (Gail O'Day, Op. Cit, p. 727)
4. New Life & New Beginnings are Breathed Out (Jn. 20:22; Gen. 2:7; Ezek. 37:9)
- a. "The resurrection story of John 20:19-23...provides a fresh vantage point from which the church can preach & teach the story of its own beginnings. The beginning of the community's life is not separated from the story of Easter; indeed, in John, the gift of the Spirit & the commissioning of the church occur on Easter Sunday evening. The Johannine Easter narratives are a reminder that the church's life is intimately bound to Jesus' life, death, & resurrection. To celebrate the resurrection,...is also to celebrate the beginnings of the church's mission in the world. Jesus lives, not because he can walk through locked doors & show his wounds to frightened disciples, but because he breathes new life into those disciples through the gift of the Spirit & commissions them to continue his work." (Gail O'Day, Op. Cit, p. 727)
  - b. A clear connection to God's work in the Old Testament (Gen. 2:7; Ezek. 37:9)
    - a. "The verb 'to breathe' occurs only here in the NT, & its usage clearly evokes the description of God's breathing the breath of life into the first human in Gen. 2:7. It also recalls the description of the breath of life in Ezekiel 37:9. Jesus' breathing the Holy Spirit on his disciples thus is described as a new, second creation. The image of new life provides an important link with Jesus' announcement in 20:17. Those who believe in Jesus receive new life as children of God (3:3-10), & the Holy Spirit is the breath that sustains that new life." (Gail O'Day, Op. Cit, p. 726)
    - b. "This breathing on the disciples recalls texts like Gn. 2:7; Ezk. 37:9. that mention God's life-giving breath. If the reference to these texts were direct, then the meaning would be that just as in the beginning God breathed a living spirit into humankind, so in this moment of the new creation Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit into the disciples & so grants them eternal life." (Herman Ridderbos, Op. Cit, p. 460)
  - c. The climax of the personal relations between Jesus & his disciples
    - a. "The gift of the Spirit...is represented, not as... a separate outpouring of divine power under the forms of wind & fire (as in Acts), but as the ultimate climax of the personal relations between Jesus & his disciples: ... 'He breathed on them & said...' 'Receive the Holy Spirit' (Jn. 20:22)." (C. H. Dodd, Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel, p. 227)
    - b. The intent of John 20:22 "is clear – Jesus' promise...about the coming Paraclete is fulfilled by his breathing of the Spirit upon the disciples...While...Luke describes the descent of the Spirit on Pentecost, John clearly connects the

reception of the Holy Spirit with the resurrection event. This is 'the Johannine Pentecost' whereby the risen...Lord gives the Spirit to his disciples. By breathing on them (echoing, perhaps, the creation in Gen. 2:7), John is 'symbolically proclaiming that, just as in the first creation God breathed a living spirit into man, so now in the moment of new creation Jesus breathes his own Holy Spirit into the disciples giving them eternal life.' In fulfillment...[also of] Jn. 3:5 ('No one can enter the kingdom unless he is born of...the Spirit'), his followers are 'baptized' so that now 'they are truly Jesus' brothers & can call his Father their Father' (20:17)." (A. Edward Siecienski, *Filioque: History of a Doctrinal Controversy*, p. 24)

d. Easter is the beginning of the church's mission in John

- a. "It is important to recognize that the Easter/Pentecost division in the liturgical life of the church reflects the storyline of Luke-Acts & does not reflect the Johannine understanding of the relationship of the resurrection & the gift of the Holy spirit. For the Fourth Gospel, the gift of the Spirit & the articulation of the community's commission are intimately & inseparably tied to the resurrection & ascension of Jesus. When the church celebrates Easter, it also celebrates the beginnings of its mission." (Gail O'Day, *Op. Cit.*, p. 727)