

**So they're huddled together, it's the first Easter night, last week we heard John tell the story, this week we have Luke's account.** It's hard for us to imagine the confusion and doubt and trauma that night. We celebrate Easter through the in hindsight. They lived through it - through that Saturday where Jesus lay dead in the tomb. They heard the reports from Mary and the Emmaus disciples. But still, they were unsure and they were afraid. They had not been loyal, not been brave, by any standard they had failed to love their dearest friend Jesus. That's what they can see.

I imagine them staring at the wall, all huddled up in that house, not sure how they got there, wondering if someday they'd be okay again. Jesus knew what they needed.

They needed Him. And then there He was. He came and stood among them. And what is the very first thing He wants to say to these disloyal, cowardly men, fearful men? Peace. **Peace be with you!** I forgive you.

Peace. This peace is a fact. When two countries are at war and they sign a peace treaty, the war is officially over. And the war is officially over, the peace treaty signed in the blood of Christ. Jesus died in the shame that should have been theirs and dead, but now risen, there is no more hostility between God and people.

But they freaked out. They thought He was a ghost. Many people at that time believed that when someone died their spirits roamed the earth, a ghost.

**Why are you troubled...Look at my hands and my feet. Touch me and see; a host does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.** And He showed them. It's really Him.

**While they still didn't believe it because of joy and amazement,** and don't faith and doubt always wrestle in us. Maybe it's all too good to be true? And in the face of that doubt, here's more good news - Jesus likes broiled fish, probably Tilapia. Ghosts don't eat fish. Real live people eat fish. God become a real and alive human being eats fish.

Peace with God is not an idea, it's a guy eating fish. Having a meal of fellowship with a bunch of sinners He calls friends. God's love has skin, and teeth to chew tilapia and a throat to swallow it. He has become man to rescue them from loving themselves and glorifying themselves and being afraid of everything and full of shame, to reach into their pain and feel it Himself, to pull them into a place where they no longer live, but Jesus Christ lives in them.

This account made me think of this painting. The title is: *What happened to your hands?* Oh, it's love honey. I wasn't going to let the devil have you! These are my love scars. And guess what - these wounds heal you. Peace be with you, little one.

The disciples needed Him to explain. SO He gave them the most amazing Bible study of all time. Explaining everything that was written about Him in the Old Testament and how He fulfilled it all. And He opened their minds to understand the Scripture. He turned on the lights for them to see that He is the Light and everything they'll ever need. And then He gives them a new job: preach repentance and forgiveness of sins in my name. You are witnesses.

They saw Him alive. And everything hinges on the historical fact that He rose from the dead and is alive.

Jesus knows what you and I need. Sometimes we get mixed up about that. But He doesn't. Sometimes we're staring at the wall, wondering how we got where we are, wondering if things will be okay. Steady and true, week after week, as Jesus did for the disciples, and for Thomas...as he did for Mary Magdalene; as he did for the two disciples on the road to Emmaus— so Jesus stands here with you. We gather round, we get out the Word, we call on His name and Jesus shows up and whispers what we need: I love you. I forgive you. I am with you.

Here's the struggle then. Whatever gets in the way of life lived by faith in the Son of God must be done away with. Whatever it is that robs you of peace; whatever doubts; whatever concerns; whatever shame you feel you

have to hang on to—you've brought them to the right place. Now set them down for a minute...lay them at His feet.

Repentance will be preached in His name - so repent. Which is to say to God: I'm someone who needs help.

He's here. He's come to stand among us, this bunch of sinners, hidden in His Word proclaimed, but really here to speak to you.

He says: look at my hands. It's love. Don't be ashamed. I forgive you. Yes, even those things you can't bear to think about.

Look at my hands. Don't be afraid, I have conquered the world and given you the faith to overcome as well.

Look at my hands. I wasn't going to let the devil have you.

He's here. He's come to stand among us, this bunch of sinners, hidden in bread and wine, but really here to touch you with His body and blood, risen from the dead.

A fellowship meal with your best friend. He says: take and eat, take and drink. And it is my sincere prayer that you can't help but hear Him saying, Peace be with you.

Behind us in time are the hands - nailed to a cross. Real moments in history that tell us how deeply we are loved because of what those hands endured for us.

Ahead of us are the hands. The renewal of all things, the moment when everything becomes right for eternity. Easter means this world is not all there is.

Because Jesus lives, there is a joy for us, in us, a joy from seeing those hands shown to the disciples, the hands waiting to embrace us, a joy that raises us above the now and the wearisome days. Easter means our days in this world are a gift.

He's alive to open our eyes and clothes us with power from on high. To open our eyes to the good all around you. To His hands at work all around us. At work in your job and your kids and your heart. In your joys and your sorrows. And clothing you with power from on high, the power that turned the disciples from doubt to worship, the power He gives right through His Word, to open your hands toward others, being the hands of God in this world, putting flesh on His love by loving one another.

In the Resurrection of Jesus Christ you get to face tomorrow with peace. It will be ok. It's why we keep huddling together here - He comes and gives us just what we need. But if you get to staring at the wall, wondering how you got there, lost, alone or afraid, please reach out to Jesus and ask: What happened to your hands?

**And then please remember Him reaching through the water to grab your head and heart and** pull you into a place where you no longer live, but Jesus Christ lives in you. It will be more than okay in those hands. Amen.