

What will we do when we go back to normal? It's one of those, if I had a dollar for every time someone has asked that question situations that I think we've all experienced over the last month. In some ways, it's kind of been a bit of a hopeful game...what's the first thing you're going to do when this is all over? What of your normal life are you longing for that you can't wait to return? I know that I've got a nine year olds birthday presents burning a hole in my closet, so the second I can get to Maryland, I'm going and I'm going to smother my nephews in as many hugs as they can possibly stand and then I'm going to watch all the sports ESPN can throw at me. We've all got our answers, those things we're longing for that we didn't maybe didn't even realize we would miss until they weren't possible. Trips to Starbucks, walks on the Noland Trail, going to the movies, walking in the grocery store without having 8 zillion questions rolling through your mind.

We're longing for a return to normal...and yet, the truth lingers in the back of our minds doesn't it? When we get back to it, normal isn't going to look normal anymore. There are simply some things that will never quite be the same in a post-COVID world. And honestly? I think we've all been wrestling with the same question in the midst of this...do we even *want* to go back to normal? Are we going to want normal as we once knew it, or are we going to let ourselves be changed by what we've been through? It's as

vital of a question for us facing down the situation that we're in as it actually was for the disciples, faced with the reality they were in...life in a post-resurrection world. In the middle of that locked upper room, the same question lingered...what does our new normal look like?

It had to have been like whiplash for the disciples, slingshotting from one emotion to the next, because the world just has not stopped spinning around them for basically 72 hours. Because we find *ourselves* a week out from Easter, we tend to think when we hear this text that the disciples are *also* a week out from Easter, that they've had time to process everything that has happened around them, but that's just not the case. Our gospel happens *Easter night*. They are mere hours removed from Mary Magdalene coming to find them and telling them that she has seen Jesus, that the tomb has been broken open and Jesus is out moving in the world again. They are mere hours removed from Peter and John hightailing it to that tomb to confirm the story and to bring back confirmation that yes, in fact, Jesus is not there. They are mere hours removed from realizing in some part of their brains that all those things Jesus said about resurrection were true.

But the thing is...how do you even begin to process all of that when they probably haven't even properly processed the last three days?! Now, they have to throw in shock, questions, relief, confusion to the melting pot of

emotions they've had going since they left the Upper Room on Thursday night and wandered into the garden with Jesus. They're wrestling with grief, pain, anger, and fear; for some of them, they're having to wrestle with knowing they denied Jesus, abandoned him in his most desperate hour, and they're all still having to process that one of their own did the unthinkable. And in the back of their minds a question has to linger...what now? If this is true...if what Mary and Peter and John have told them is true...if Jesus is alive...if resurrection is real...what on earth do their lives look like now?

And the instinct that we all have now, has to be the disciples' instinct too. Jesus is back!?! Then we can go back to normal!!! Nothing has to change!! If Jesus is here, then life can just go back to the way that it was. He's our leader, we're the disciples. We'll get the crowds rustled up again, there will be healings and parables and we'll walk hundreds of miles, but wow, what a relief!! Normalcy... There has to be a part of their minds that thinks that even with everything that they've been through that they can just revert back to their old selves, sink back into their old roles, like nothing has to change, even though everything has fundamentally changed. Even if Jesus were able to stick around with them in a post-resurrection world, that world would also have been a post-Good Friday world, and so there was going to be no way that they could go back to the crowds, the teachings, the

miracles, not when the authorities have already killed Jesus once. But...as we all know, when your brain latches on to one corner of normalcy, it's going to cling to it for all it's worth.

But Jesus isn't particularly interested in letting them cling to that for very long. He knows these men so well, and so it makes sense that the first thing that Jesus releases into this room when he appears to them is...peace. Like take a deep breath, I know this is going to be entirely overwhelming and a lot to process, so peace, peace be with you. It's like he wants to calm and settle the room down before he gets to the big stuff. The disciples have to be in the right mindset to be able to hear what comes next, because what comes next is going to show them quite clearly that their lives in a post-resurrection world are going to be unlike what they had been living before. Jesus needs them to breathe before he can lay out for them what their new normal is going to look like.

And what that new normal looks like is as complicated and as simple as this: now...in a post-resurrection world...they're the ones in charge. Now, they are going to have to take all the things they have learned from Jesus, about Jesus, about themselves, over the last three years, over the last three days, and they're going to have to live into letting it change them. They don't get to hang back and linger in the shadows anymore, they don't

get to just ride the sidelines until Jesus calls them up and tells them to go do something that he needs them to do. No...life, faith, ministry in a post-resurrection world is allllllll up to them. How's that for a new normal?

They don't get to go back to the way things once were. The disciples don't get to pretend that nothing has happened, that Jesus' death and resurrection hasn't brought to light all of the things that are now different in the world. If they want the last three years to have made a difference, if they want Jesus' life, death, and resurrection to have made a difference, they're going to have to be the ones to go out and act like it did, no one else is going to do it.

And Jesus just kind of lays that out there, they've gotten their deep breaths and now it's time for their sending. Just as God sent Jesus to change the world, now Jesus is sending them out. Jesus lays upon them the Holy Spirit and then says guess what? All that love and forgiveness stuff we talked about? You're in charge of it now! My ministry is now yours. You can revert back to your old selves if you want, but that is not what I'm commissioning you to do, today I am commissioning you to not only be my disciples, but to be the messengers of the gospel That is your new normal.

We, like the disciples, sit here in the midst of two significant changes, and both of them beg the same question. The first is the reality that we too live in a post-resurrection world, and yet so often we act like it doesn't

matter. We live as though resurrection is something far off that we don't have to think about or let impact our lives, on a daily basis, when in fact our call, our commission is the same as the disciples, to go out into God's world and *live* like our faith in Jesus risen from the dead matters. So often we just act like our faith is this little part of ourselves that we unbox on Sunday mornings and then once church is over, put it away until next week, as though it's not something that is supposed to be impacting how we live and love and view the world every moment of every day. Living as resurrection people means that our normal is not the normal of the world, it means caring for those that the world ignores, speaking up for those that the world would try to silence, loving our world, our siblings, our communities with the same kind of sacrificial love that we have received ourselves. We don't get to pretend like the resurrection doesn't matter, we've been sent to live like it does and far too often we just go through the motions as though it never happened, as though it hasn't fundamentally changed who we are.

The same goes for the people we will be when this is all over, and I mean that for when we're here in this building and for when we're out in God's world. We're going to be so desperate to return to normal, but life in a post-COVID world could look so entirely different, if we're willing to be changed by it. To look back on this time and realize how much we have

longed for community, and so when we're back to it, cherish that community, nurture it, strive to spend time together doing things that *matter*. To look back on this time and realize how much time we spent caring about and worrying for others, even those whom we didn't know, and so when we're back to life, not forgetting that, but realizing that this has brought home the call of Christ to love our neighbors as ourselves and strive to live with love and hope and compassion, even when there isn't a pandemic swirling around us. To look back on this time and realize how much we took for granted, and to not slip back into old rhythms, but to maybe declare that in the midst of this we have found who we were truly meant to be as people, as the church, as children of God.

The disciples had a choice...life like the resurrection didn't matter or like it had changed everything for the better, including them. We have the same choice...are we going to live in these post-resurrection days like what happened last week was some run of the mill thing or like it is the thing that defines who we are individually and as a community. And eventually are we going to live in these post-pandemic days like we are no different for what we've been through or like it has brought home to us who we are. Children of God called, claimed, and sent to be resurrection people in a world longing for life. **AMEN!!!**