

We all have those weird little quirks, right? Those things that we couldn't even possibly tell you where they came from, but are just part of who we are and what we do. It could be something as simple as a specific element of your morning routine or something you do when you're leaving the house. We've all got them, our own idiosyncrasies. For my mom, and I wish I knew where this came from, and she has no idea either, but for her, she can do nothing in threes.

It's not something that many people know about her, but it particularly comes out when you watch her eat something like candy. If she has three pieces, she has to have a fourth, because she cannot do anything in threes. It's this strange little count that she keeps in her head, if she's doing something it becomes a choice between stopping at two or knowing will go to four, because you are not landing on three. Now, of course, the deep irony of all of this is that, while my mother has lived most of her life living by this rule of threes, she made an exception with one really big piece of her life. It's possible some of you, putting together the pieces of my family have already figured this one out. However, here you have my mom, my do nothing in threes mom who sits here...with three kids. We tease her about this constantly. The fact that she won't eat three jelly beans, but has to eat a fourth, but when it came to children she decided that three was good. She's

never quite had an explanation for it, it's just kind of a fact of her life, her life that she will continue to live by the rule of threes, with the caveat that said rule doesn't apply when it comes to have kids.

Yet, my mom seems to be a deep exception to what basically seems to be the rule of threes that most of the world lives by. Whereas my mom finds three deeply unsatisfying, most people would say that the idea of having things in sets of three is deeply effective, it gives things a sense of roundness, of wholeness, of completion. Think about it, would the story be as effective if it was *The Two Musketeers* versus three? How would it have felt growing up hearing the story of the Big Bad Wolf and the *Four* Little Pigs? It just wouldn't have the same weight, the same oomph. Doing things in threes helps them feel solid. This actually came up in Bible study this week because it seems that even Jesus lived a bit by the rule of three, which led Dave Carlson to remind all of us that you have to hear something three times for your brain to fully process it. And maybe, just maybe, Jesus was aware of that, because he seems to want to make sure that of all the things the disciples hear from him this morning, one thing in particular really sinks in. Sinks in enough that he in fact says it, repeats it...three times.

John doesn't mince words about the vibe in this room this morning. It doesn't matter that the disciples have received word from Mary Magdalene

and John and Peter that the tomb is empty, that the resurrection and the promise Jesus gave them was real. There's no space in this room for hope, for looking towards the future. The only thing that the disciples know for now, can only process for now is fear. And I mean, can you really blame them? They just watched a tidal wave of chaos wash over their entire lives. Their week started with this massive triumphal entry into Jerusalem where it felt like this had the makings of a monumental and celebratory Passover, only to have it end with Jesus dead. They know that the authorities are asking questions, rumors of Jesus' body not being in the tomb would have started to circulate, and eyes would be on them. Did they steal it? Are they trying to incite a riot? Do they need to be arrested just like Jesus because they were complicit in this alleged crimes? Had they been aiding and abetting a criminal for the last three years and now it was time for them to be called to account? Is it any wonder the disciples are terrified and holed up inside of this room? I don't think any of us would want to be out roaming the streets in this environment. No, we'd be locked up tight too.

It is into this room, where the fear is so thick you can practically slice through it that the resurrected Jesus enters. We don't know how, but suddenly, Jesus just appears, and the first thing he says is...*peace* be with you. It's the first iteration of these four words. Peace be with you. And it's

like this first time, Jesus knows it's not really going to break through, it's not going to sink in, they aren't going to process it. These first words of peace are spoken simply to try to lower the temperature in the room. If the disciples are lost in this fog of fear, they aren't going to be able to hear anything else he has to say. So first, Jesus has to calm those fears a little bit. He has to try and put them at ease. They might not feel it yet, but they've gotta hear it...peace. Take a deep breath, let go of some of the tension and fear. Peace. We have work to do, but first peace.

So Jesus takes time with them and extends his hands to them and shows them the marks of the crucifixion in order to give them some solid grounding in the reality of the resurrection. Something tangible to hold onto so that they can get to the next step in the process, because that one is a bit bigger than just letting go of their fear. Jesus then gives them these words a second time, peace be with you, deep breath, because now...now I am sending you out. Now the mission, the ministry is yours. Just as God sent him, he is now sending them, and if you're the disciples alarm bells have to be going off in your brain because *hello!!!* God sent Jesus and *Jesus died!* This isn't some hunky dory, happy mission he's sending them on. Sending them out means they've gotta leave this room and get to work, trying to get people to believe in the wild wonder of the resurrection and that the message

of Jesus still rings true even after the events of Holy Week. So...this second round of peace is to still their hearts and steady their souls for their sending.

The final iteration of this peace trio comes a week later and once again into a moment of chaos. The rest of the disciples have had time to wrap their minds around everything they have seen and heard, and now they have to walk with poor Thomas who just wants the same consideration. His heart, his mind are still frantic, and he just wants what he missed out on. Into the chaos, Jesus once again descends and for the third time says, peace be with you. Three rounds of peace, and hopefully now it means it will sink in. It's like this last one is Jesus saying, now you're able to hear it hopefully this peace gives you the assurance that all will be well. You don't need to be afraid, you know what you're being sent out to do, so breathe, you got this. It's like the final oomph they need before going out and taking on the world. The third one, the one that sinks in will hopefully help them become fully and truly who Jesus called them to be all those years ago.

I think in these hazy post-Easter days, we also need Jesus to step in with this rule of three and give us the promise, the hope, the assurance, the calling of peace. The frustrating reality is that we always so desperately want Easter to break into reality and change it. We want the promise of the empty tomb to dispel all of our fear and sorrow and worry. Just like the

disciples, we sometimes find ourselves surrounded by a fog of fear. Fear of the future, fear of things going on in our lives, fear of the things that go in the world around us, fear sometimes of everything, such that we do need Jesus to just lower our baseline temperature with those few words...peace be with you. We need Jesus to just breathe that peace into our unsettled hearts and let it sit there for a second before we can process anything else.

Because we know that this calling that Jesus gives to the disciples is not limited to them, it is expanded through the wonder of the Holy Spirit to us. We are sent just like them, just like Jesus to go out into the world and be the mission of the church, be the ones who spread the word of the gospel, be the living embodiment of Christ's hands and feet in the world. And yes, we carry the uncertainty of that call, knowing the frustration, the pain, the angst that came Jesus' way, the disciples' way, the early church's way. We know we are sent, but we also know that it's not an easy call and so we feel it but we also feel that hesitation like...do we really want to do this? *Can we really do this?* Because this is hard work and it's scary and it threatens to just take it all out of you. And into that space of commission and calling, Jesus once again comes...peace be with you. You can do this. You got this.

Finally, we all just feel that need to sit back and let Jesus' words hit us, hit us square on in the chest with the assurance that all of this, all the

chaos, all the worry, all the fear, it's going to be ok. Even when we doubt, even when we don't feel like we're equipped, even when we're uncertain, even when the world feels too heavy to hold, Jesus promises us...peace be with you. It's going to be ok. All shall be well. Because the deep and abiding promise of Jesus' peace is that it's *Jesus* who gives it. He knows what it is to fear and to feel the weight of this calling and to just ardently hope that it's all going to work out. So with his peace comes the promise that he will abide with us and stay with us in that peace. The resurrection brings the assurance that Jesus remains, by our sides, our greatest champion, our greatest hope.

So...for this morning...for this season...for the next steps of this journey...we need to hear this, over and over and over again until it sinks in. We need Jesus to breath the rule of threes into our hearts so that we can feel this peace in all of its promise and all of its hope. We need it to dispel our fear, call us out, and promise us that we don't go alone. We need it to hit not only our minds, but our hearts, our very souls. We need to be able to take it in so that it can fill our lives for the work that lies ahead. The work of the resurrection, the work of the kingdom of God, the work of discipleship. Hear it, feel it, breathe it in. Three times may not be enough, but it's a start. Peace be with you...peace be with you...peace be with you. **AMEN!!!**