Post-Easter, looking at role of Spirit as Advocate or Defender of Accused, sent by risen Jesus so disciples would not be alone. Spirit would be their Advocate as Jesus had been.

**Most of material on Spirit is in a long discourse on eve of death.**

But Risen Jesus also makes four appearances in John.

1. Easter morn, Jesus outside empty tomb mistaken for garden/ mood is shock & disbelief. 2. That evening Jesus appears to his closest disciples minus Judas & Thomas; the mood is fear. 3. Part B of that appearance: A week later Jesus appears to the same group plus Thomas; the mood shifts to wonder-awe. 4. Some time Later, Jesus makes breakfast for Peter and others and has a walk with Peter. Mood is normalizing-warm connection, working things out.

Of these 4, Spirit is featured in the second. 2\textsuperscript{nd} appearance is paired with the 3\textsuperscript{rd}, some time/place a week later on with Thomas this time. So they function as a single unit, 2 & 3.

Read & comment as we set scene. Like we did last week pay attention to what in this scene intrigues you, what you find your heart drawn to. Take that as clue—bring that part of scene into our time of quiet reflection at end. Five main features: disciples fear, Jesus saying Peace be with you, shows them his scars, breathes on them, give forgiveness instructions, all in context of sending them out, and ongoing prominence-importance of his scars. (fear, peace, breath-Spirit, forgiveness, send, scars)

*When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews...*

John uses term “the Jews” as a technical term referring to the Jewish opponents of Jesus: Pharisees, high priests, and temple authorities (the latter backed by power of Rome.) Remember Jesus was Jewish, his disciples were all Jewish, and the author of the gospel of John is almost certainly Jewish (his Greek is very limited, more so than other gospels). Jesus is referred to by the Jewish title of respect “rabbi” more than any other gospel.
The mood of the disciples is fear. Jesus has been victimized by a scapegoating mob and Rome has crucified him. Crucifixion was designed to be traumatizing to witnesses. Political purpose: instill terror in witnesses. Which it has done in this case—disciples are traumatized & terrified. Don’t feel safe in Jerusalem. They don’t even want to go outside for a smoke.

*Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.”*

Hebrew behind word peace is SHALOM, rich with connotations: peace, rest, reconciliation, a state of living in harmony with God, creation and other people. Plus, there was a mystical sense in which one Jew could give another his peace.

Given how our mirroring system works, we know that anxiety is easily “caught” from others, but same is true of peace-calm. If you’ve ever been to ER, anxious about yourself of your loved one—there’s something calming when the doctor/PA/NP walks into the room and is calm-confident-reassuring. Instinctively relax.

*After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side.*

Jesus wants them to see his scars. This is significant. John makes a big deal of this by featuring it a week later. More on this later

*Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord*

Gospels are sophisticated about how disciples struggle to perceive the risen Jesus. It’s not until their fear abates that they actually see that its Jesus. After all, fear is not about smelling the rose, it’s about getting the hell out of there.

*Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you.”*

Now that they recognize him he has to start over: Peace be with you.

*“As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”*

Remember, they are terrified about what is just beyond closed doors. To them it’s a dangerous world out there, a trauma generating world, and he’s now sending them out there?

But remember too how powerfully reassuring it would have been to see him calmly alive and thriving, not dead any longer. No one had ever done that before. It opens new possibilities doesn’t it? If death is not simply the ultimate disaster but a doorway into this kind of being alive, it takes the sting of death out.

It must have a powerful impact on them, simply knowing Jesus was doing so well. Early grief dreams, especially after a sudden loss disturbing—loved one is alive but
not really, dead but not really, and its distressing. I had these dreams after Nancy’s mother died suddenly and then after she did. And Jesus death was sudden.

After a sudden death only later do you get the “There’s my loved one and she looks happy!” I like these experiences much better, I had a blessed prayer six years after my dad died. He had his struggles with life. I felt my dad show up sitting next to me and he was totally fine. I was able to unwind that part of me that worried about him. Oddly he said to me, “Paul is here and he’s fine too.”

Caleb Brokaw helped us launch BO but then he got lung cancer. Death was quick but not sudden, and I noticed I had a few dreams about Caleb. He was happy-thriving and super himself.

All to say, **don’t underestimate how reassuring** it would have been to these disciples to see Jesus doing better than ever.

*When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”*

All connected to their fear of what’s out there. After the second dose of peace serum, he breathes on them saying, “**Receive the Spirit**”. Not so weird as it sounds. Very first divine- human encounter in the Garden has God kneeling in the dirt, breathing into the human’s mouth. [In Hebrew and GK, same word for wind-breath-spirit] and the human becomes a nephesh—living soul, living being.

This is the language of personal-intimate encounter-connection. You can have a close encounter like that with an animal (your dog). You can have it with another person: a baby’s breath, a teammates breath in a huddle, a co-workers breath whispering in a meeting, a lover’s breath. But there is also a close encounter of third kind: feeling the divine breath.

This close encounter of a third kind helps us move out beyond whatever doors are closed and have us cowering behind them.

When MLK sat in his kitchen after threatening phone call late at night, ready to give up the just beginning bus protests in Birming-ham he had to feel divine breath...and he did at kitchen table.

Often its just reassurance: *I’m here. I’m with you. You’re not alone to figure this all out let alone to fix it.* [D.I experience]
When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

John ties these three together: Jesus sending them out, giving them the Spirit, and empowering them to forgive. All connected.

In Jewish tradition, we do important things in partnership with God. Forgiveness is a function of freedom, not compulsion. Obviously God has the freedom to forgive or not. Here, Jesus makes it clear that we have the same freedom.

Remember these disciples of Jesus, mostly Galileans in the Big City Jerusalem, witnessing a horrific scapegoating event (will the purging continue?) are feeling very much like victims.

But Jesus treats them as though they have power over their enemies, and all forces hostile to them. This is the new possibility opened up to them by his resurrection. Worst an enemy can do is kill you. What it that isn’t the fame-ending disaster we all think it is? If you believed it wasn’t, that would give you enormous power?

I think Jesus is framing this so they understand that their power over their enemies is the power to forgive (and if it’s to be freely exercised, it has to mean the power not to forgive.)

Their mood has been cowering fear. His mood is we’re in the cats seat here.

Forgiveness isn’t acquiescence to the enemy. That’s how they practiced it. They mirrored Jesus in forgiving their enemies—there were no calls for taking vengeance against the temple authorities or the Roman army. But they felt bold and empowered to call the authorities out for the injustice of it all.

Remember in the death and especially the rising of Jesus, God is exposing the scapegoat, a process attested to the Hebrew Bible where figures like Abel, Hagar, Joseph, Job are plainly represented as being victims of the mob—a new thing under the sun, since all the previous scapegoats in ancient world presented as guilty. It’s the role of the Spirit as Advocate to declare their innocence in the face of mob justice.

So yes, forgiveness to break the cycle of violence that produces scapegoating. But also calling it out whenever it appears.
Remember Paul under interrogation by the religious authorities (getting scapegoat treatment). High priest orders him to be struck in the face for one of his answers and Paul cries: “You whitewashed wall! You who pretend to be a guardian of our Law, break our Law by mistreating me!”

Read 3rd edition preface by David Gushee.

I’ve learned this from Emily...

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.” A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

First thing Jesus does a week earlier? Shows them his scars. A week later, the encounter with Thomas emphasizes their importance even more.

It was important to Jesus and to the disciples who had these stories preserved that there be a record of what happened to him. An injustice was done, and though it is forgiven, it’s not forgotten. This is part of a long project undertaken by God with the people of Israel to unmask scapegoat mechanism which is all based on a big cover up. The victim deserved what he got. Or sending him out of the community wasn’t unspeakable cruel, it’s what had to happen. The scars are an eternal witness, a record in his body.

This is also a great comfort to us. When you go through trauma part of the struggle is knowing how it has affected you—that you walk with a limp so to speak, visible or invisible.

The fact that the risen Jesus has scars reassures us that even our scars can be incorporated into a thriving version of us. We are not ultimately diminished by what
we suffer, we are dignified by what we suffered. Because we are not suffering along. We suffer with God who suffers with us.

If you are worried about the damage life has done to you, this shift of perspective is especially important. Because Jesus is the suffering servant who redeems our suffering, there is dignity in the scars bring with us to God’s table. They are not an embarrassment to God and they don’t need to be an embarrassment to us. A time may even come when, like Jesus, we show them off.

[Ty. sharing with such amazing dignity]

Scapegoat mechanism contingent on a cover up, ensured the silence of victims—their story not told

Forgiveness tied to spirit—but authority to forgive is very much owned by the people harmed who are free to forgive or withhold forgiveness.

Forgiveness is the power they have over their enemies/opponents.

The scars: there will be a record of your suffering (tied to forgiveness—to forgive is not to erase the record of your suffering)

David Gushee’s 3rd edition
When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

Jesus and Thomas

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The Purpose of This Book

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.