

Echoes of Scripture

Pentecost – John 20:19-23

Summary of John 20:19-23

Jesus appears to the disciples behind locked doors fulfilling his pre-crucifixion promises. He shows them his hands and his side. He gives them his peace. Then he breathes on them and gives them the Holy Spirit. He sends them back into the mission field to continue his work of reconciling the world to God and caring for all God's people.

Suggested Course of Study

- Read John 14-16 (Jesus' farewell discourse)
- Read Genesis 1-2 (The Creation stories)
- Read Ezekiel 37:1-14 (The Valley of Dry Bones)
- Read John 20-21 (The resurrection Appearances)

Immediate Context

John 18:1-11	The betrayal and arrest of Jesus	John 19:38-42	The Burial of Jesus
John 18:12-14	Jesus before the High Priest	John 20:1-10	The Resurrection of Jesus
John 18:15-18	Peter Denies Jesus	John 20:11-18	Appears to Mary Magdalene
John 18:19-24	High Priest Questions Jesus	John 20:19-23	Appears to the Disciples
John 18:25-27	Peter Denies Jesus Again	John 20:24-29	Jesus and Thomas
John 18:28-38	Jesus Before Pilate	John 20:30-31	The Purpose of This Book
John 18:38-19:16	Jesus Sentenced to Death	John 21:1-14	Jesus Appears to Seven
John 19:17-30	The Crucifixion of Jesus	John 21:15-19	Jesus and Peter
John 19:31-37	Jesus' Side Is Pierced	John 21:20-25	Jesus and the Beloved Disciple

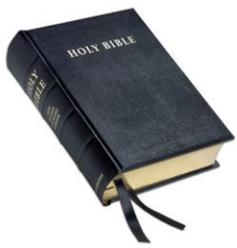
The Textⁱ

JOHN 20:19-23 (NRSV)

¹⁹When 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." ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." ²²When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

Key Words

WHEN IT WAS EVENING ON THAT DAY, THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK – Notice the hint of darkness alluded to in the text. The disciples are afraid and most likely don't believe the testimony of Mary Magdalene. It is evening and the fact that it is still the first day of the week (which again draws us back to the creation story in Genesis 1:5) highlights the fact that Jesus is ushering in a new day; the new creation has begun. The light will shine in the darkness and the darkness will not overcome it.



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DOORS OF THE HOUSE... WERE LOCKED FOR FEAR OF THE JEWS – Jesus had told the disciples that things were going to get hard. Jesus has just been crucified by those in power. No wonder they were afraid.

See John 7:10-13 ¹²“And there was considerable complaining about him among the crowds. While some were saying ‘He is a good man,’ others were saying ‘No, he is deceiving the crowd.’ ¹³Yet no one would speak openly about him for fear of the Jews.”

See John 11:7-8, 16 “Jesus said to the disciples, ‘Let us go to Judea again...’ The disciples said to him, ‘Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?’” “Thomas... said to his fellow disciples, ‘Let us also go, that we may die with him.’”

See John 11:45-57 ⁵³“So from that day on they planned to put him to death. ⁵⁴Jesus therefore no longer walked about openly among the Jews, but went from there to a town called Ephraim in the region near the wilderness; and he remained there with the disciples.”

See John 12:9-11 (The plot to Kill Lazarus)

See John 12:42-43 (“Nevertheless many, even of the authorities, believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they did not confess it, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved human glory more than the glory that comes from God.”) Notice that many of the “authorities” believed in Jesus. It is dangerous to paint all Jews or “religious leaders” with broad strokes; to label all “Jews” or even all “those in authority” as opposed to Jesus. This clearly wasn’t the case. A better way to talk about it is “those Jews who were opposed to Jesus”.

See John 14:27 “Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not be afraid”

See John 15:18-21 “therefore the world hates you... if they persecuted me, they will persecute you... but they will do all these things to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.”

See John 16:1-4 “They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, an hour is coming when those who kill you will think that by doing so they are offering worship to God.”

See John 16:20-22 “Very truly, I tell you, you will weep and mourn, but the world will rejoice; you will have pain, but your pain will turn into joy.”

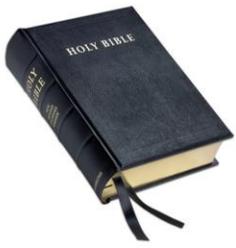
See John 16:32-33 “The hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each one to his home, and you will leave me alone... I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!”

WHERE THE DISCIPLES HAD MET – In John’s gospel, we are not sure where this would have been. The text itself does not identify the exact location. Though, we can infer that it was likely either at the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus (see John 12:1-2) or at another location in a town called Ephraim in the region near the wilderness (see John 11:54). The home of Lazarus in Bethany is the more likely location, though if you look in the gospel of Luke, the disciples are gathered in Jerusalem (see Luke 24:33).

JESUS CAME AND STOOD AMONG THEM AND SAID, “PEACE BE WITH YOU” – Just as the tomb could not hold Jesus back, neither can locked doors.

Jesus has come to offer Peace! The word for peace is *Εἰρήνη* in Greek. The Hebrew word for peace is *שָׁלוֹם*. The messianic expectations of peace can be seen throughout the Old Testament:

Isaiah 9:1-7 ⁶“For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷His authority shall grow



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continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.” (See also Isaiah 11:1-9)

Numbers 25:12 ¹²Therefore say, ‘I hereby grant him my covenant of peace. ¹³ It shall be for him and for his descendants after him a covenant of perpetual priesthood, because he was zealous for his God, and made atonement for the Israelites.’ ”

Leviticus 26:3-13 ⁶And I will grant peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and no one shall make you afraid; I will remove dangerous animals from the land, and no sword shall go through your land.”

Isaiah 54:10 ¹⁰For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the LORD, who has compassion on you.”

Ezekiel 34:23-31 ²⁵I will make with them a covenant of peace and banish wild animals from the land, so that they may live in the wild and sleep in the woods securely. ²⁶I will make them and the region around my hill a blessing; and I will send down the showers in their season; they shall be showers of blessing.”

Ezekiel 37:24-28 ²⁶I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will bless them and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary among them forevermore. ²⁷My dwelling place shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”

Malachi 2:4-7 ⁵My covenant with him was a covenant of life and well-being, which I gave him; this called for reverence, and he revered me and stood in awe of my name.” (The word in Hebrew that is translated as “well-being” is the word שְׁלוֹמִים).

When Jesus comes to the disciples behind locked doors, he greets them twice with the words: “Peace be with you!” These words recall the words of comfort he gave them at the Last Supper:

John 14:25-31 ²⁷Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”

John 16:33 “I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!”

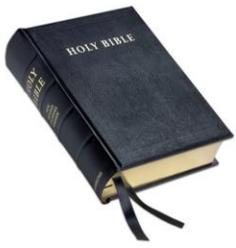
The one who has conquered the world (conquered suffering and death) is there standing before them, greeting them with an offering of peace.

HE SHOWED THEM HIS HANDS AND HIS SIDE – (See John 19:31-37; Jesus’ side is pierced with a spear).

AS THE FATHER HAS SENT ME, SO I SEND YOU – Throughout John’s gospel, Jesus describes himself as the one who has been sent from the Father (see John 1:33; 3:31-36; 4:34; 5:23-30, 36-38; 6:29, 38-39, 44, 57; 7:16-18, 28-33; 8:16-18, 26-29, 42; 9:4; 10:36; 11:42; 12:44-49; 13:16-20; 14:24; 15:21; 16:5; 17:3, 8, 18-25). Jesus words here about sending the disciples into the world is reminiscent of what he said in his prayer for the disciples in chapter 17 (see especially 17:18).

Jesus is sending them out into the world to continue his mission. To what mission is Jesus sending them? See the following:

John 13:12–17 (NRSV) ¹² After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? ¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. ¹⁴ So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. ¹⁵ For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. ¹⁶ Very truly, I



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tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them.¹⁷ If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

John 13:31–35 (NRSV)³¹ When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him.³² If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once.³³ Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come.’³⁴ I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

John 14:1 (NRSV)¹ “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.

John 14:12 (NRSV)¹² Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father.

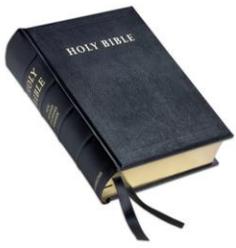
John 14:15–21 (NRSV)¹⁵ “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever.¹⁷ This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.¹⁸ “I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.¹⁹ In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live.²⁰ On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.²¹ They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”

John 15:1–5 (NRSV)¹ “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower.² He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit.³ You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you.⁴ Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.⁵ I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.

John 15:12–17 (NRSV)¹² “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.¹³ No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you.¹⁵ I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.¹⁶ You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name.¹⁷ I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

John 20:30–31 (NRSV)³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book.³¹ 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.

John 21:15–17 (NRSV)¹⁵ When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my lambs.”¹⁶ A second time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Tend my sheep.”¹⁷ He said to him the third time, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” And he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.



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THEN HE BREATHED ON THEM – See Genesis 2:7 “⁷then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being” and Ezekiel 37:1-14 (the Valley of Dry Bones) which includes mention of the breath of God and the putting of God’s Spirit within.

RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT – λάβετε πνεῦμα ἅγιον. The Greek word πνεῦμα can mean “wind, breath or spirit.” In Hebrew the word is רוּחַ which also can mean “wind, breath, or spirit”. Jesus promised that he would send the Holy Spirit to the disciples. See John 7:39, 14:16-17, 25-26; 15:26–27; 16:7-15. Jesus also refers to the Holy Spirit as the Advocate (NRSV; helper in the NASB; counselor in the NIV and RSV; comforter in the KJV and ASV). The Greek word there is παράκλητος which means “helper, encourager, mediator”. In Luke-Acts, the Holy Spirit is received at Pentecost, but here it is given by Jesus through his breath.

RETAIN THE SINS OF ANY – Is this verse prescriptive or descriptive? Does Jesus give them power and authority? Or does Jesus describe what happens when people forgive or not? Can the disciples use God’s authority at will? Can they use it to condemn others according to their desires? Can they use it to seek divine retribution or revenge? How did Jesus use God’s authority to forgive or retain sins?

For the notion of sin and condemnation in the gospel of John, see the following passages:

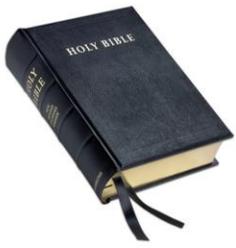
John 1:29 (NRSV) ²⁹ *The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*

John 3:17–18 (NRSV) ¹⁷ *“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God.*

John 5:19–29 (NRSV) ¹⁹ *Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. ²⁰ The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing; and he will show him greater works than these, so that you will be astonished. ²¹ Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomever he wishes. ²² The Father judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son, ²³ so that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Anyone who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. ²⁴ Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life. ²⁵ “Very truly, I tell you, the hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. ²⁶ For just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself; ²⁷ and he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. ²⁸ Do not be astonished at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice ²⁹ and will come out—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.*

John 8:7–11 (NRSV) ⁷ *When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” ⁸ And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. ⁹ When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. ¹⁰ Jesus straightened up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” ¹¹ She said, “No one, sir.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.”*

John 8:21–30 (NRSV) ²¹ *Again he said to them, “I am going away, and you will search for me, but you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come.” ²² Then the Jews said, “Is he going to kill himself? Is that what*



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he means by saying, 'Where I am going, you cannot come?'"²³ He said to them, "You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world."²⁴ I told you that you would die in your sins, for you will die in your sins unless you believe that I am he."²⁵ They said to him, "Who are you?" Jesus said to them, "Why do I speak to you at all?"²⁶ I have much to say about you and much to condemn; but the one who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him."²⁷ They did not understand that he was speaking to them about the Father.²⁸ So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me."²⁹ And the one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him."³⁰ As he was saying these things, many believed in him.

John 9:35-41 (NRSV)³⁵ Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"³⁶ He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him."³⁷ Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he."³⁸ He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him.³⁹ Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind."⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?"⁴¹ Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.

John 15:18-27 (NRSV)¹⁸ "If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you."¹⁹ If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. Because you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world—therefore the world hates you."²⁰ Remember the word that I said to you, 'Servants are not greater than their master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also."²¹ But they will do all these things to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me."²² If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin."²³ Whoever hates me hates my Father also."²⁴ If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not have sin. But now they have seen and hated both me and my Father."²⁵ It was to fulfill the word that is written in their law, 'They hated me without a cause.'²⁶ "When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf."²⁷ You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning.

John 16:7-11 (NRSV)⁷ Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you."⁸ And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment:⁹ about sin, because they do not believe in me;¹⁰ about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer;¹¹ about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.

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