A.B. Simpson, a Presbyterian minister who served in Louisville, KY, said, “The Easter [season] is New Year’s Day for the soul.” These 5 verses in John 20 give new hope for those feeling hopeless, comfort the stressed, provide peace to those needing it, and challenge the remnant!

John’s gospel repeats Jesus’s new days of resurrection, as he appears to many people. Our risen Lord shows himself three times within John 20 alone: first to Mary, then to the disciples, then to Thomas with the disciples. In John 21, Jesus gives a “new year’s resolution,” if you will, to Peter. I’m glad God patiently keeps repeating himself to those with longing in their souls.

Aren’t we fortunate that God tolerates our hard-heartedness and repeats how he loves us through these great, redemptive gospel stories? Followers of Jesus help keep the freshness of Easter alive, by receiving God’s gift. That gift is that Jesus breathes peace into people that perpetuates God’s plan as we, in turn, bless others. Bless especially those with bruised souls.

Our OT passage describes God's people in exile period, ruled by the foreign empire of Babylon. It was a soul-searching and confusing wilderness time. What God’s people trusted and knew and were comfortable with had all been taken away. They needed a savior to bring hope, so Isaiah foretold of a servant that would carry our sorrows, be crushed for our iniquities, and bring peace by his wounds.

Likewise, in the NT passage, the disciples were scared and afraid. They were holding up in a room with the doors locked. They were lost and confused. Then their Savior comes to them, giving calm. He stood among them. The root word implies comes-to-be-kindred- spirits- with.

Do we need Jesus to come and stand among us? When would we not?! Where would we not?! He is present, especially when we feel afraid. In the here and now, God stands offering good to those who are feeling this way, who are tired and weary, frightened, or worried.

Imagine the aching souls that some people are living thru this weekend. This is the first Sunday after 100s of Christians in Sri Lanka were victims of awful terrorism. They are deeply mourning and needing renewal and peace after persecution for their faith. Surely, they are questioning their neighbors. I don't know who is safe to talk to or trust… as I sit at a
stoplight, or stand in line at a market, or whether I’ll be harmed while I’m doing normal things like check my phone. Dare I let my child play with other children down the street that may have families secretly plotting against me to know my routines to sabotage my family as we pray & worship?

People closer to home can also feel: leery, confused, lonely, grieving, or in some kind of hole.

The good news is that Jesus cannot be stopped by these challenging emotions, or walls, or doors, or distance, or broken relationships. He can’t be hindered. Jesus can, and often does, appear in our midst in these types of moments.

Not only does He appear, but also, He gives a needed blessing. “Peace be with you,” he says. The text has Jesus repeating this for some reason. Maybe it’s because this is hard to believe; nobody has ever come back to life, after all. Maybe it’s because we get trapped/shackled by what we’re going through, so God needs to keep chipping away at our walls.

Jesus is in the business of breaking down walls between people, just as he has overcome the wall-of-sin standing between us and our heavenly Father. This reconciliation is the power of the empty cross, where he once was but no longer remains!

His peace, breathed on the disciples, reminds us of: God breathing life into Adam and Eve in the Genesis creation. Now, God breathes into the disciples to form a new creation of people serving one another and sharing in their suffering, just as Jesus did and still does.

Then He shows, by way of his pierced hands, that he shares all the suffering that others have been afflicted by or WILL BE afflicted by.

There once was an orphaned boy living with his grandmother when their house caught fire. The grandmother, trying to get upstairs to rescue the boy, perished in the flames. The boy’s cries for help were finally answered by a man who climbed a hot iron drainpipe and came back down with the boy hanging tightly to his neck.

Several weeks later, a public hearing was held to determine who would receive custody of the child. A farmer, a teacher, and the town’s wealthiest citizen all gave the reasons they felt they should be chosen to give the boy a home. But as they talked, the boy’s eyes remained focused on the floor. Then a stranger walked to the front and slowly took his hands out from his pockets, revealing severe scars on them. At this the crowd gasped, the boy cried out in recognition. This was the man who had saved his life. His hands had been burned when he climbed the hot pipe. With a leap, the boy threw his arms around the man’s neck and held on for dear life. The others silently walked away. Those marred hands had settled the issue. Leslie Flynn’s story from the devotional “Upper Room”
echoes Jesus’ sacrificial love for us. Jesus’ redemption converts our pain to healed scars.

His healing presence changes the disciples, mostly because there is a personal relationship with the Lord. He transforms them in their chaos, guilt of betrayal, replacing it- as a balm- with a command to create a new community. Not merely to give them personal assurance, but also to send them OUT into the world. They were to carry forward the work that Jesus had done. His father had sent him, and now Jesus perpetuates that sending the disciples (which is US), with the Holy Spirit to breath good onto others.

How far do we go?

Franciscan friar Richard Rohr says we need to go really far, so we intentionally dislocate ourselves. If everyone we see on a regular basis looks just like us, he says we are not going out. The sending Jesus describes is about re-locating ourselves socially, politically, theologically, geographically, etc...

For example, commuting to do outreach like KARM this afternoon, or serving out of your norm at our church on a committee you wouldn’t do otherwise, or starting to attend a Bible study for minorities “dislocates us.”

Since God’s grace is universally good, then I dream that we share with everyone, rather than just those it’s conveniently comfortable to share with.

When we do, we dis-locate ourselves, and we are going to see scars in people. We carry scars, too, though. Even if we’re tempted to hide our scars, we can be inspiring people- of-faith to share how God has healed us, or IS healing us- how God has given us shalom. That peace that Jesus wants manifested is in a form of forgiving someone, like a new resolution.

Despite my cowardly ways of isolation, enclavism, or getting in a rut of convenience, God calls me, and all of us, to go beyond what we have been to make a new community firmly lodged in forgiveness.

Now, forgiveness is something that I understand about as much as a kindergartner. I’m working on it and don’t have it quite down. I feel like forgiveness that I’m receiving from God on a regular basis is something that I’m learning intra-personally, and interpersonally, i.e. with myself & with others.

God’s Spirit is breathing into some of my relationships. I am seeing the Spirit take away some of the barriers; God walking right through walls in order to bring healing and wholeness.

Thankfully, God does not forgive people’s sins because we do so, nor does God withhold forgiveness because we do. Rather, God’s breath of grace can blow where it will so there is “No More Night.”
Maybe you’re familiar with Malala Yousafzai, a Nobel Peace Prize winner and refugee, who lives halfway around the world in Pakistan. Malala is a modern-day example of the strength to forgive. Even in the face of the oppressive Taliban regime, she heroically advocates for young girls’ education. You should check out her new inspiring YouTube series for teens.

She was only 15 when a gunman attacked and viciously beat her. From her injuries, she can’t hear out of one ear, her vision is impaired, and her face remains slightly contorted. She laughs in the face of his hatred, saying she carries no anger, not “one atom or proton.” She reveals her scars to many with a powerful life-giving message of hope that melts away division and discrimination.

Not all of us boldly stand out like Malala. We might even struggle with forgiving a loved one. Billy Graham once responded to a person asking about how to forgive a family member who’d just passed away. Graham said reconciliation with them, on this side of eternity, is challenging. But it’s not too late to be reconciled to God! We have offended God far more than we’ve offended any person — and yet He still loves us and wants to welcome us into His healing family.” Romans 5 says, “God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” that we might be raised to new life. Don’t let your guilt over the past, or anything else, keep you from Christ. Instead, trust His promise of pardon. Let’s invite Him to come into our souls anew, scars and all.

Better yet, let’s ask ourselves who is someone with scars to breath peace into/ to pass the peace of Christ with.