Speaker 1:

When we are confronted with a crisis in life, a challenge bigger than we can handle, or just an old fashioned neighborhood bully it's our natural tendency, whether we're 9 or 99, to seek refuge and hide behind closed doors. That's what the COVID-19 pandemic has done to us. It's driven us, by government order and common sense, to find a place to shelter, cut off from others, and perhaps with a fair bit of anxiety about what lies ahead.

Speaker 1:

These days, all of us are sheltering from home. For different reasons, we find the disciples in the Gospel of John Chapter 20 are in a similar situation. The Lord Jesus Christ has been put to death on the cross. The disciples seem to still be unaware of Jesus's resurrection and, certainly, had reason to believe that they might be next to suffer persecution. The fear, anxiety, and feeling of uncertainty that grip the disciples led them to shelter from home.

Speaker 1:

In those moments, Jesus showed up at the door and provided a message of hope to the disciples that ring true to us today. Let's look at the passage found in John Chapter 20. First, we read in Verse 19 that the disciples retreated, not only behind closed doors, but that the doors were locked behind them. The disciples were cut off from the rest of the world with drawn shades and bolted doors. Coming out was not an option that the disciples seem to be considering in those moments. However, let me just say that in these days of ours, it's important that we figure out ways to reach out beyond sheltering at home. I'm not talking about breaking protocols in this pandemic, but I do mean figuring out ways to have a Godly influence from our home.

Speaker 1:

I have a friend, back in California, whose mother is in her early 90s. Being at home, behind closed doors is how she spends just about every day. However, she is not a prisoner in her home. She finds ways to connect with the world. She's on Facebook, she writes notes of encouragement, makes phone calls. She even keeps a prayer journal, and is known as a prayer warrior. Behind closed and locked doors, this beautiful woman of God has an influence that stretches all around the world.

Speaker 1:

Today, more than ever, let's be looking for ways to reach out beyond the walls of our home to others in new and creative ways. "Who can I call today? Whom can I send a note of encouragement? For whom can I say a prayer?" Let's not see ourselves as prisoners in our home, but instead as ambassadors of hope. The disciples were not only behind locked, closed doors, but they were fearful. I suppose they feared a hostile world would soon becoming after them, just as it had for Jesus. They had reason to be afraid and, frankly, so do we.

Speaker 1:

There are lots of good reasons for fear in a fallen world. The fear of violence, of poverty, of loneliness, and the fear of illness all makes sense. In these days, the COVID-19 pandemic has created a climate of fear that can be paralyzing. However, it is in these days that we need to focus less on our fears and more on God's promises. You'll remember that in the days leading up to Jesus's death, He promised his disciples in John:17 that He would not leave them or forsake them. He promised in His word the presence of His Holy spirit. He promised to be faithful, available, and just. Friends, when we are tempted to give into fear, let's remember the promises of God in Philippians 4:19, that He will meet all our needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

Speaker 1:

So, when faced with crisis, the disciples were found behind closed, locked doors. They were gripped with fear, but then Jesus showed up and what did He do? The passage tells us that Jesus came and stood among them. Jesus showed up at just the right time at their point of need, and declared in verse 21, "Peace be with you." Peace is something Jesus brings better than anyone else in all of history. He brought it to the storm on the Sea of Galilee. He brought it to the mind of the man possessed by the legion of demons. He brought it to the troubled hearts of Mary and Martha, as they grieved the death of their brother, Lazarus. Today, Jesus offers that same peace to us. Of course, peace does not mean the complete absence of conflict, we are all in unsettled times. But, the peace Christ offers is a sense of wholeness and completeness that comes in a relationship with Him.

Speaker 1:

We have officer friends serving in Italy, and on a recent Sunday morning they were playing worship music to calm their own spirits. While they listened, they felt compelled to open the windows and doors of their home, so their neighbors could hear the beautiful music too. Several commented on the peace that the music brought to their spirits. For at least a few moments peace reign supremely in troubling times.

Speaker 1:

Verse 4 of song number 586 declares, "There are depths of love that I yet may know ere they face-to-face I see. There are Heights of joy that I yet may reach ere I rest in peace with Thee. Draw me nearer, nearer blessed Lord, to the cross where Thou has died. Draw me nearer, nearer blessed Lord to Thy precious bleeding side."

Speaker 1:

Finally, we are reminded that Jesus gave His followers the power of the Holy Spirit and, with the Spirit, He gives us something to do. He calls us to go and to share the truth of the gospel through word and action. I thank God that all around this territory Salvationist are proving themselves to be empowered and motivated by the Spirit as they serve tens of thousands of needy Canadians with physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual encouragement.

Speaker 1:

These are days in which we are told to shelter from home. It's good advice, and direction, but let's not be gripped by fear and anxiety. Instead, let us look for ways to reach out to God and to connect with others more intimately than ever. In these days of post-Easter celebration, let us seek opportunities to be His channels of peace to others. God bless you.