

When Jesus finds his disciples hidden in an upper room 'for fear of the Jews' as John would have it, his first words are 'Peace be with you' – for he knows that they are afraid not essentially 'for fear of the Jews', the presenting reason here, but because they lack his presence and if it weren't the Jews it would be any one of a number of other 'fears' that would be the cause of their paralysis. He too of course had been afraid but had faced his fears and found not only a cross awaiting him but life after death, or better put perhaps, simply 'life', for what Jesus brings is God's life for us always. We can frame this in terms of belief, or faith, or words such as 'Jesus is Lord' but the felt reality is a gift that we also, and often surprisingly, find we share with others – the disciples are changed both individually and as a body when Jesus comes among them and gives them the breath of his very own spirit. Their differences fall away and they find themselves inspired, encouraged, by the one spirit – able to forgive others because they have found themselves forgiven by Christ. Far from condemning them for their fear he has formed them anew. This experience is portrayed by Luke as taking place some 50 days later. After Jesus' death and resurrection, but it's essentially the same – life in Christ and available to all people everywhere, not a life for a few hidden in a room or a church or a chapel somewhere but a life that can sustain us wherever we are and indeed in a world where strife is a necessary constituent of life, which makes life what it is – an amazing mix of individuals of every species which in their interaction and interdependence keep life going and are what life is. This is where the confusion of the Tower of Babel which was destructive only becomes the creative confusion of life lived now in the one spirit – many languages still but understood as sustaining life in all its rich variety not as a threat but as a place in which we too can live and have our being, at peace with the turmoil both without and within. I may be pressing this analogy too far but what I have in mind is Adam Nicolson's discovery of life on the sea shore as necessarily in flux.

*'Truly to see a shoreline now is to recognise that strife is it's order, that a balanced community is dependent on power- centres in tension, the frame pulling against the strings of Heraclitus' bow or lyre, and that the injustice and diminution of a dominant monoculture represents the absence of strife. It's a paradigm of nature opposite to the idea that living things hang happily and stably together in a set of mutually accommodated niches. It substitutes tension for stillness, flux for calm, Heraclitus is now the spirit that presides over life between the tides'. (The Sea is not made of Water page 158)*

Not quite, for although Jesus is preparing his disciples to re- enter this world of flux and to encounter it's strife once more it's not as lone individuals but with his spirit that they will do so, or better, with God's spirit which alone presides over life between the tides, which is the life breathed on the world at creation and breathed on us now.

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