

John 20:19-31

**“Bringing True and Lasting Peace”
Second Sunday of Easter (B)**

April 7, 2024

Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, West Salem, Wisc.
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Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

“On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them...” (John 20:19a).

Last week’s Gospel lesson from Mark 16 left us with some questions. Yes, we heard the angel’s Gospel proclamation to Mary Magdalene: ***“Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified One. He has risen; He is not here”*** (Mark 16:6). But we were left without a sighting of the resurrected Jesus. Now, Jesus knows that we need His physical presence. And He did show up for us last week in His Word and Sacrament, but we are still wanting more.

For the apostles on that Resurrection Day, they didn’t know what to think. To be sure, they had heard from Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome, that Jesus is risen from the dead, but they were still sitting in fear and fright behind locked doors. Their hearts are too weak and heavy to believe the news they have heard. They didn’t know what to believe. Then all of a sudden Jesus stands among them and says: ***“Peace be with you”*** (John 20:19b). Jesus didn’t sneak through a broken window or use a spare key. He just appeared. He arrived to bring peace to His weary apostles.

With Jesus in their presence, He gives them ***“the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, [that] guards [their] hearts and [their] minds in Christ Jesus”*** (Philippians 4:7). Now, this peace is not worldly peace. As Christians, like us, they will continue to daily suffer misfortune and hostility. Like us, Satan will continue to oppress them and afflict them. Like us, the fallen world will continue to alarm them with persecution and tyranny. And, like us, their own sinful flesh will continue to alarm them with their own weaknesses and impatience.

For these apostles, they are sitting there behind locked doors in great fear of the Jewish authorities. Except for Thomas, they will not go out. All they see is death before them. But even before Jesus arrives, they are at worldly peace. Nobody is there threatening their lives. Nobody is there attempting to kill them. Yet inwardly their hearts tremble. Inwardly, they have no peace or rest.

It is in this fear and anxiety that Jesus comes. It is in this fear and anxiety that Jesus comes to soothe their hearts. It is in this fear and anxiety that Jesus sets His apostles at peace.

Now, don't misunderstand. Jesus is *not* taking away the danger. Jesus is *not* removing the malice of the Jewish authorities. Outwardly, everything remains unchanged. But now, through Jesus' words, "***Peace be with you,***" their hearts are no longer afraid.

Outwardly, like us, all the misfortunes remain: sickness, poverty, sin, the devil, and death. These evils do not cease. But inwardly, the apostles are at peace. The apostles are strengthened. The apostles are comforted. Through those words, "***Peace be with you,***" they no longer care about any misfortune as they become more and more courageous and bold.

The same goes for us, when Christ comes through His Word and Sacraments, He lets all our external adversities remain, but strengthens our faith. Out of timidity, He makes a fearless heart. Christ makes a trembling heart bold. He makes a restless conscience peacefully quiet. Through Word and Sacrament, the Holy Spirit makes us confident, courageous, and cheerful in the things that would otherwise frighten us, such as the power of sin and death, and all other distresses. Christ's peace is a true and lasting peace, which remains forever and is invincible as long as you cling to Christ.

However, this peace only happens and comes when Christ points His apostles and us to His hands and His side. It is only when Christ shows us through the Word that He was crucified for us and shed His blood and died for us. Through His death, He has paid for our sins and appeased and warded off God's wrath for us. This is the sign that comforts our afflicted consciences and hearts, which assures us of divine grace and the forgiveness of sins.

But what could it mean for Jesus just appearing inside a locked upper room? Well, Jesus came to His apostles this way to point out that after His resurrection, His kingdom on earth will no longer be bound to a bodily, visible, tangible, and worldly way of life, to time, place, space, or the like. Rather, Jesus is now present and rules through His power everywhere, in all places and at all times, when and where we need Him, and He will always be with us and help us unhindered through His Word and Sacraments.

This Christ did on that first Easter evening, but not every apostle was there. Thomas was missing. As for where Thomas was, we do not know. But for some reason, Thomas was the only apostle who wasn't frightened enough to remain behind locked doors. Even though Thomas made his way outside, He still had the same anxieties as his fellow apostles. He still had the same doubts of his fellow apostles. Those anxieties and doubts that Jesus calmed for the others.

After Jesus departed, Thomas returned. Immediately, the other apostles told him, ***"We have seen the Lord"*** (John 20:25a). After all that the apostles have gone through, Thomas likely thought that his fellow brothers were playing a joke on him. *How could this be? Jesus was dead.* So, Thomas said, ***"Unless I see in His hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into His side, I will never believe"*** (John 20:25b). Thomas is hedging His bet. This is as if Thomas said, *"You can say you saw Him, but I don't believe you. Prove it!"*

Eight days later, all the apostles were together, including Thomas. While the doors were locked again, Jesus appeared and stood among them and said, ***"Peace be with you"*** (John 20:26). Then Jesus, knowing Thomas' heart, said to Thomas, ***"Put your finger here, and see My hands; and put out your hand, and place it in My side. Do not disbelieve, but believe"*** (John 20:27).

With those same calming words, ***"Peace be with you"*** and His gestures toward His hands and His side, Jesus calmed Thomas' anxiety and fear. Now with confidence and courage, Thomas says, ***"My Lord and My God!"*** (John 20:28).

A lot of times, we like to criticize Thomas by calling him "Doubting Thomas," forgetting that Thomas was of the same mindset as the other apostles. They all doubted. They all lived in fear and anxiety. Peace only came when the Crucified and Risen Christ appeared. Peace only came when Jesus showed them His hands and His side and said the words, ***"Peace be with you."***

This morning, Jesus is offering us peace. He is bringing us true and lasting peace, the peace which this fallen world does not understand. He is bringing to us ***"the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding"*** (Philippians 4:7a). Jesus brings us this peace to all repentant sinners through the gift of absolution that He instituted.

Following that second announcement of peace, Jesus says to them, ***“Peace be with you. As the Father has sent Me, even so I am sending you. Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld”*** (John 20:21-23). This peace Jesus gives to His apostles in connection with His wounds is peace won for all mankind. This is what Jesus is declaring with this second announcement of peace. Like the apostles, we too, have been sent out by Jesus as His disciples. Jesus is calling us to tell this good news of peace to all who would hear it as we have received this peace from Him.

As redeemed and forgiven in Christ, the Church is commissioned by the Crucified and Risen Christ to forgive repentant sinners in His Name. When we do so, those sins are also released in heaven. They are wiped away, as if those sins never occurred. At the same time, the Church is also commissioned by Christ to retain those sins of the impenitent sinner in His name. The impenitent sinner is one who is not sorry for their sins against God and their neighbor. They have no guilt or any need for Jesus. They refuse to repent of their sinful life, but instead choose to continue in sin. For such a person as this, those sins are not forgiven, but remain on the sinner, who must account for them before God.

True peace and lasting peace is only received through faith in the Crucified and Risen Jesus. This Word of forgiveness is spoken by the Church in the stead of Christ through the Office of the Holy Ministry. To reject it is to reject the benefit of forgiveness.

Jesus pronounces this blessing of peace only on those who believe upon hearing the Word of peace from the Church without requiring visible or tangible proof. Thus we, who have not seen, may with certainty trust the same word of peace the apostles did.

Jesus’ third announcement of peace is for us. ***“These words are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His Name”*** (John 20:31). Unlike the apostles, we cannot see Jesus’ hands and His side, but the Crucified and Risen Christ has not left Himself without witness. We can open our mouths to receive His very Body and Blood, given and shed for the forgiveness of our sins. In this blessed Sacrament, Christ assures us again and again that our sins are forgiven. May Christ’s Word and Sacrament fill you with the true and lasting peace only Jesus can give. **Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed!**
Alleluia! Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen. + **SOLI DEO GLORIA** +