

The Second Sunday of Easter | St. John 20:19-31  
April 23, 2017 | Saude & Jerico Lutheran Churches

**In Nomine Iesu**

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Lord God, heavenly Father, we thank You, that of Your indescribable grace, for the sake of Your Son, You have given us the holy Gospel, and have instituted the holy Sacraments, that through these we may have comfort and forgiveness of sin: We beseech You, grant us Your Holy Spirit, that we may heartily believe Your Word; and through the holy Sacraments day by day establish our faith, until we at last obtain eternal salvation; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever. Amen. (ELH, p. 155)

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)*

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*The sermon text for this morning is taken from the twentieth chapter of the Gospel according to St. John. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:*

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 and said to them, "Peace be with you." When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. / Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent Me, even so I am sending you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld." / Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "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." / Eight days later, His disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then He 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." / Thomas answered Him, "My Lord and my God!" / Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen Me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." / Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these 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. (ESV)

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*These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Jn. 17:17)*

In Christ Jesus, who preaches peace to those who are far off and peace to those who are near (Eph. 2:17), dear fellow redeemed:

If you asked a child or a sibling or a friend not to do something, and then they went ahead and did it right in front of you, how would you respond? You would probably like to be able to stay calm and level-headed in such a circumstance, but you may find that your temper gets the best of you. The disobedient action often results in an equal and opposite reaction. And the offender would have to see this coming. He or she would expect consequences for their bad behavior.

What they would not expect is if you came up to them and said, "I am not angry with you at all. I forgive you, and I love you. We are at peace!"? Can you imagine how wide-eyed that person would be? The consequence that was deserved and expected does not come about. This is essentially how Jesus dealt with His disciples on Easter Sunday.

## I

You will recall Jesus' warning to them the night before His death, "*You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee*" (Mt. 26:31-32). Peter and the other disciples said that they would sooner die than deny Jesus (v. 35). Later that evening, Jesus asked Peter, James, and John to watch with Him in the garden, but they all fell asleep (vv. 38-45). Not long after, when soldiers came to arrest Jesus, "*all the disciples left him and fled*" (v. 56). Peter and John mustered some courage and entered the courtyard of the high priest to see what would become of Jesus. There, Peter explicitly denied three times that he even knew Jesus, the One whom he had accompanied for three years.

On the third day after His suffering and death, Jesus rose again and left the tomb. He appeared to some women who had come to anoint His dead body. He said to them, "*Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me*" (Mt. 28:10). Jesus had every right to be angry with His weak disciples, but there is no hint of that in His words. He even called them His brothers!

The women conveyed Jesus' message to the disciples, but we are told that "*these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them*" (Lk. 24:11). Even more reason for Jesus to be irritated with them! But then what are the first words He spoke to them when He appeared in the place where they were hiding? He said, "*Peace be with you!*" Think of how they had contradicted Him, and told Him they would never fall away. Then they did fall away. They acted like they did not know Him. They hid.

And Jesus spoke peace. This is unexpected. We assume there should be judgment, harsh words, a clear consequence. He did rebuke their unbelief (Mk. 16:14). He said to them, "*Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?*" (Lk. 24:38). But His primary message to them was peace. Jesus was not finished with His disciples. He had big plans for these men. They hardly seemed the right candidates for His work. They were so weak, so filled with fear. This is why Jesus came to them with a gentle word of peace. He wanted them to know that He would not count their faithlessness against them, and that He was not bitter toward them.

When Jesus spoke peace to them, He was not expressing a wish or simply trying to cheer them up. He was giving them peace. What He says, He delivers. He declared to them the powerful Word of comfort that God would not punish them for their sins. Peace had been made between God and man by Jesus' death on the cross. His resurrection was God the Father's stamp of approval on His saving work. Peace was theirs both now and forever. But it was not theirs only.

## II

Jesus said again to His disciples, "*Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you*" (v. 21). What He was sending them to do, He also made clear. He breathed on His disciples and said to them, "*Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you*

*withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld" (vv. 22-23).* Jesus gave the authority to forgive or not to forgive sins to His Church, beginning with His apostles. He wanted the peace of His death and resurrection, the peace of sins forgiven, to be declared to generation after generation from that time forward.

The first mission prospect of the disciples was Thomas, one of the Twelve who was not present when Jesus appeared. What did they tell him? They said, *"We have seen the Lord!"* In other words, *"The Lord is risen! He is victorious over death and the grave! He has won peace for us with God!"* But Thomas would not believe it without physical proof. He needed to see and touch the marks from the nails and spear. He would settle for nothing less. How stubborn he was! The report of one disciple may have been dismissed as a dream. But by that time, the women claimed to have seen and talked with Jesus, as did the two disciples from Emmaus, as did Peter and James and John and all the rest.

But Thomas' stubbornness is not so hard to understand. You and I have had our share of doubts too. Like Thomas, we have wondered if Jesus could really be present. When we are struggling and the difficulties of life are piling up, it certainly seems as though we are alone with no one to care for and help us. We cannot feel the presence of Jesus. We imagine that wherever God is, He must not have time for our problems. And sometimes we also demand proof from God beyond His promises, as Thomas did.

But God has nothing to prove to us, any more than He had anything to prove to Thomas. He did appear to Thomas about a week later, but it was with a firm rebuke for his unbelief. He said to him, *"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (v. 29).* Even so, He still commissioned Thomas as He had the other disciples to spread the Gospel message of His death and resurrection for the salvation of all.

### III

This is a shocking message to the world, and we know why. The idea seems too far-fetched that God could be at peace with me after all the sins I have racked up, all the occasions I put my needs above everyone else's, all the time I spent thinking I knew best. The disciples were that way too. No matter how often and how clearly Jesus said it, they did not believe He would rise from the dead. At heart, you and I are the same as every human being. We want a god of our own making, one who does not require us to wrestle against our own fallen nature, one who does what we think he should do. But the god we want is not the God that is.

The true God loves us, and because He loves us, He is not content to let us stay secure in our sins. God the Father sent His only Son to take on our flesh and join us in our weakness. Jesus came to make peace, but not by a treaty and not by striking a deal with sinners. Peace with a perfectly just God required holy blood shed on man's behalf. Jesus supplied that for you and me. He made peace for us with God.

That is a peace we need to hear about often. We need to hear it often because we continue to sin. We have a hard time forgiving others. We do exactly what God says we should not do. We are like that child or sibling or friend who hears what was expected of them, and then does the exact opposite. This is why God established the office of pastor.

The authority to forgive or not to forgive sins belongs to the whole Church, to every single believer in Jesus. That means you are qualified to extend forgiveness to anyone who sins against you. But it is not your calling to preach, to baptize, and to administer the Lord's Supper. It is my calling to do these things publicly on behalf of the church. I have been called to dispense and administer the gifts of Jesus to anyone who repents of sin and trusts the promises of God.

And so Sunday after Sunday I forgive your sins. God knows you need to hear this. And it is not just a reminder. When I speak God's Word of forgiveness, you actually are forgiven, right then and there. Any and every sin you brought with you to church is blotted out before God through that Word of forgiveness. No matter how you have sinned against Him in the past—like that long list of sins the disciples committed against Jesus—all of that is forgiven and forgotten in Jesus' word of peace.

This realization of what God does for you may be almost as shocking as Jesus suddenly appearing to His disciples in that closed room. But Jesus was there declaring peace just as surely as He is here declaring peace. If the Lord did not want you to be comforted, there would be no pastor saying His words to you. There would be no Sacraments where His grace is dispensed. There would be no Bible to turn to again and again to read and review. But you do have all these things. You know who Jesus died and rose again for. It was for you, even weak, sinful you.

Your Father in heaven does not give you what you expect. He does not give you what you deserve. He gives you Jesus, and Jesus gives you salvation. **Jesus Speaks Peace to the Weak.** You are weak by nature, but you are strong in Christ, and that is the only strength that matters. Peace be with you! Your sins are all forgiven in Him!

*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.*

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