

The Second Sunday of Easter
St. John 20:19-31: "Jesus Comes from the Tomb with Gifts."
April 10/11, 2021 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer 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. (*Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*, p. 155)

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

The sermon text for today 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)

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

In Christ Jesus, who took our sins to His grave and rose from the dead with forgiveness, life, and peace for us, dear fellow redeemed:

When the ancient Pharaohs were buried, they were buried with all sorts of treasures and provisions. The tomb of King Tut contained over 5,000 items including a solid gold coffin, weapons of war, furniture, food, and clothing. The Egyptians believed they would need all these things in the afterlife. But ultimately those treasures lay unused until robbers or

archaeologists found them. The Pharaohs were buried with great plenty but never lived again to use it.

Jesus was put in a tomb with nothing but burial cloths and the spices that accompanied them. The Jews did not believe like the Egyptians that earthly things could be taken into the eternal realm. The Jews believed that death was death, so they assumed that the amazing work of Jesus was over and done. They would not see Him again on earth.

Suppose they had believed Jesus' promise that He would rise again. What do you think they would have buried with Him in the tomb? Maybe some food and clothes? Some ointment for His wounds? If they had believed His promise, I think they would have wanted to be there in the tomb with Him, waiting and watching for Him to start breathing again.

But His disciples did not believe, not yet. Today's text describes what happened on the evening of Easter. Jesus had risen from the dead early that morning and appeared to several women who came to the tomb expecting to find His dead body. He had spoken to two of His followers on the road to Emmaus. And at some point that day, He had also appeared to Simon Peter.

But none of these appearances coaxed His disciples out of their fear and hiding. They remained huddled together in an out-of-the-way place in Jerusalem. They felt completely lost without their confident Leader. They probably tried to remember the things He had told them, but none of it seemed to do much good now that He was gone. They almost certainly felt ashamed for boasting that they would fight with Him to the death before deserting Him when He was arrested. As much as they would like to be with Him again, how could they bear to look Him in the eye?

Then suddenly Jesus was standing right there in the room, right in their midst! We expect the first words from Jesus' mouth to be something like, "Now do you believe?" or, "Why didn't you listen to what I said?" or, "Why are you here hiding?" But the first words from His mouth were, "*Peace to you!*" Jesus was not concerned about punishing His weak disciples or hatching a payback plan against those who beat Him and crucified Him. He did not come to "take names" or to "take revenge." He came to give, to give gifts.

His sacrificial death brought peace with God. If Jesus had not suffered and died for our sins, we would still be opposed to God. We would be His enemies, and His wrath would be turned toward us (Rom. 5:9-10). Because we have proven ourselves to be no more faithful than the disciples. We wonder why they didn't believe when Jesus told them He would rise again. But others could wonder why we haven't lived the way God has told us to in His Ten Commandments. God always speaks clearly and truthfully, but we do not always listen to and follow Him faithfully.

We don't deserve to have peace with God. But "*Peace!*" is what Jesus declared when He rose from the dead. He made peace by going to the cross and shedding His blood in payment for our sins (Col. 1:20). This is why He said, "*It is finished!*" just before He died (Joh. 19:30). But those words would have been empty if Jesus had not risen from the dead. He could have said whatever He wanted and made whatever promises, but none of them would have mattered if He stayed in the grave.

His resurrection proved that He truly was the Son of God and that His work to save sinners was complete. His empty tomb shows that peace was made between God and sinners. God is not at war with us. He wants to empty tombs, not fill them. He promises that all who trust in Jesus as their only Savior will rise just as Jesus rose. St. Paul writes that He *“was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification. Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Rom. 4:25-5:1).

So Jesus rose with a message of peace for His disciples. It wasn't the first time He had promised them peace. Shortly before His death, He told them, *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid”* (Joh. 14:27). And how did He find them just a few days later? With troubled and fearful hearts (Luk. 24:38). But *“the things that [made] for peace”* had been accomplished (Luk. 19:42). He had died and risen again. The peace of His forgiveness and life was not dependent on their actions or attitude. The *“Peace!”* He declared was a gift coming from His saving work.

It was a gift He wanted others to have too. *“Peace to you,”* He said again. *“As the Father has sent Me, even so I am sending you.* What a strange thing! The disciples might have expected Jesus to disown them for their weakness and faithlessness. Instead He commissioned them to bring His message of peace to the world.

Then we come across a detail in our text that causes us to scratch our heads a bit. St. John writes that after declaring *“Peace!”* for the second time, Jesus *“breathed on them.”* We don't usually think of getting *“breathed on”* as a positive thing. Think back to when you were a kid. Did you ever tell your brother or sister to go away and stop breathing on you? And in our year of facemasks and social distancing, getting *“breathed on”* was avoided by people around the world.

But Jesus breathed on His disciples. His breathing on them was tied directly to the words that followed, *“Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”* Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit upon them, so they would be equipped to bring His peace to others.

One Lutheran commentator argues that Jesus did not breathe on each disciple individually but on the group as a whole. If it had been individually, He would have done the same for Thomas when He appeared again a week later. But this breathing out of the Spirit was not just for these special individuals; it was for the Church of all time (*The Wenzel Commentary*, p. 792).

Jesus has given the Church the authority to forgive sins or to retain sins. This is called the *“Office of the Keys.”* To those who are sorry for their sins and believe in Jesus as their Savior, the Church declares *“Peace!”* We tell them that the door to heaven is open to them because of what Jesus has done. But for those who are not sorry for their sins, the Church cannot declare *“Peace!”* Peace was won for them by Jesus, but the unrepentant reject it by denying their sins. Until they admit their sins, heaven is closed to them.

No one can make another repent of their sins and trust Jesus' Word of peace. It is not in our power to change hearts. But God can. He does this transformative work through His Word.

Wherever the Word is, God the Holy Spirit is active. Jesus clearly tied together the message about what He had accomplished with the ongoing work of the Spirit. And we see the effect His Spirit-filled Word had on His disciples. They went from anxiety and doubt to comfort and confidence.

The Holy Spirit does the same for you when you hear the powerful Word of God. Through the Word and Sacraments, Jesus comes right here in our midst. He comes to you in the midst of your troubles and sorrows and doubts, and He says, "Peace to you!" He breathes His rich blessings of forgiveness and life upon you by sending the Holy Spirit to you. The Holy Spirit assures you that everything Jesus did was for you.

Anyone can know the facts about Jesus' death and resurrection. But knowing the facts alone does not save you. You are saved by believing that Jesus' death and resurrection were for you, that He reconciled you eternally with God, that He won your freedom from sin, death, and devil. This gives great comfort as you struggle along in this life and are afflicted by anxieties and fears. Jesus triumphed over all your enemies and continues to bring you the comfort, hope, and strength of His victory.

Those Pharaohs stored up treasures in their tombs out of greed and selfishness, but all of it was taken from them. Jesus took no riches into His tomb, but He emerged with wonderful gifts to give. Jesus gives these gifts every time you partake of the Word and Sacraments in church and as you encourage one another in personal conversation.

Wherever Jesus' Word of peace is declared, the Holy Spirit is working to turn doubts into confidence and sorrows to gladness. The gifts of Jesus bring peace to our troubled hearts and prepare us to depart this world in peace to join Him in heavenly glory.

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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