

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobnier, Illinois
Easter 2A
April 19, 2020
John 20:19-31

The Peace that Leads to Confession

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." 27 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." 28 Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:26-28 ESV)

In the Name of Jesus,

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Can you relate to the disciples hiding behind locked doors for fear? For the disciples it was fear that the Jews who had killed their Master would come after them next. For us it's the fear of COVID-19 – getting it ourselves or possibly passing it on to someone else. In either case, we must not lose sight of what's most important and that's that Jesus is risen from the dead.

As we consider the disciples on the first Easter night, we might wonder what they were so afraid of. After all, they'd followed Jesus for three years. They'd heard Him preach and teach. They'd seen the signs He'd done – feeding the multitudes, healing the sick and afflicted, raising the dead. Peter, James, and John had seen Jesus transfigured. What more did they need? Hadn't Jesus told them that on the third day He would rise from the dead? Didn't they listen to Him? Well, perhaps they did - at times. After all, Jesus had also told them that a student is not above his teacher and that they would be sent out as sheep among wolves (Matt. 10:16). And since the Jews had killed Jesus, their fear was not without reason. Yet, their real problem was their lack of faith in Jesus and His Word. They refused to believe the news that Jesus was alive. They'd heard from the women. They'd heard from the Emmaus disciples. But that word wasn't enough. And, besides, if it's true, if Jesus really was alive, risen from the dead, what would He say or do to them?

Oh, and then there's Thomas, you know, the one forever known as the doubting one. Why wasn't he there that Easter night? Was he afraid to even be with the others? Was he distracted by something else? Did he have something more important to do? We don't know. But we do know he missed seeing Jesus that night and he refused to believe the other disciples when they told him Jesus was risen and that they'd seen Him. He didn't just doubt, though; he steadfastly refused to believe until he had received the same evidence the other had seen. He wouldn't believe their word until he not only saw the nail marks, but actually touched them. He would

only believe in a risen, living Jesus with the nail marks and spear wound, for that was the only Jesus in whom he would trust; that was the only Jesus who could save him.

You see, Thomas was just like the other disciples. None of them had believed the women when they reported seeing Jesus alive. They didn't believe the disciples from Emmaus who reported they had seen Jesus alive. Their word wasn't good enough. So Jesus appears to them to give them what they needed – proofs, peace, and faith. He gave them proofs as He showed them His holy wounds. He ate with them. This was no mirage. It was real. Jesus really was alive.

More than that, Jesus gave them peace. On that first night, Jesus said, "Peace be with you," at least twice. And His words do what they say. They actually bestow the peace they proclaim. Jesus was not angry with them. He was not going to punish them. Instead He forgave them. And as a result of the proofs, especially His scars, and that peace, they believed. And on that night a week later, with Thomas now present, He does it again. He gives Thomas the proof he demanded. And at seeing Jesus' wounds, Thomas declared, "My Lord and my God!" The proofs, the peace, the faith were all gifts from Jesus to the disciples leading them to confess Christ.

But there's more. Jesus gave them as witnesses of all these things. Jesus sent them to forgive and retain sins. Their word was Jesus' Word. And today's Pastors follow in that divine office. They proclaim the apostolic word which delivers Christ and His saving work. They forgive the sins of the penitent, those who are sorry for their sins and want to do better. They retain, or bind, the sins of the impenitent, those who are not sorry for their sin and don't intend to change. Jesus says if someone repents and confesses, the disciples' word of forgiveness is as sure in heaven as anything, for it is in reality Jesus' word of forgiveness. And if someone refuses to repent of his sin and turn from his sinful way, the disciples' word binding that sin to that sinner is as sure in heaven as well, for it too is Jesus' word. Such impenitence rejects the forgiveness Jesus won on the cross and so freely gives; and the sin remains on the person.

So blessed are you who have not seen and yet have believed. For while you have not seen the wounds and scars in His body, the risen Lord Jesus continues to show Himself to you in Word and Sacrament. In Baptism, He declares your sins forgiven. He claims you as His own dear child, and a lamb of His flock. The Holy Spirit worked through that holy washing and the Word that was proclaimed to create faith in you.

And He continues to use the Word of the Gospel in Absolution to release you from your sins so you can live in the freedom of a child of God. You are free from fear of your sins. You are free from sin's condemnation. For that has all been placed on Jesus in your stead.

And, of course, the Jesus who died and rose again is present in His Holy Supper as He gives you His very Body and Blood for the forgiveness of sins and to comfort, strengthen, nourish, console, encourage, gladden your soul, and fill you with joy and peace as you live in the valley of the shadow of death. He pours out His forgiveness, His grace, His mercy in overflowing measure. He doesn't hold anything back. And all so you "may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

As you continue to shelter-in-place, as you take reasonable precautions so you don't get the virus or somehow pass it on to others, do not fear, and do not be distracted from what is most important. Jesus is with you and He doesn't hold anything back. His death. His resurrection. His eternal reign. Jesus continuing to deliver the benefits of His redemption through His pastors to propel you toward your future home. God's Word and Sacraments, the means by which pastors forgive and retain sin, are your stay and confidence and peace and joy each day. For our Lord gives you exactly what those disciples received – a resurrected and living Lord Jesus to forgive you, to give you His peace, to give you faith. He is your Savior who is with you always. So learn from the disciples and what Jesus does for them, for He does the same for you. Learn to touch the flesh of Jesus as it enters your lips, and confess with Thomas: My Lord and my God. For your Savior is the One who suffered, died, and rose again. Your Savior is the living One with the nail marks in His hands and feet and a spear wound in His side. No other Jesus will do. So don't be distracted, but keep your eyes on Jesus. Trust in Him and He will keep you and deliver you through all this to life everlasting.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener