

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Easter 2B
April 11, 2021
John 20:19-31

Gathered Around His Words and His Wounds

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." (John 20:19 ESV)

In the name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world,

Alleluia! Christ is risen! [He is risen indeed! Alleluia!]

Fear can be paralyzing. It can so overwhelm us that we don't know what to do, or we say or do the wrong thing. At its root, fear is the result of unbelief, not trusting God and His Word. That's why Adam and Eve hid after they ate from the forbidden tree. That's why the Israelites often feared their enemies. And that's why the disciples were behind locked doors. Though Jesus had repeatedly told them about His death and resurrection, they did not believe. And though there were multiple reports from those who had seen Jesus alive, they did not believe those reports either. Thus they are behind locked doors "for fear of the Jews."

We too are often afraid, and there is much to fear. There's a lot in our world to cause anxiety and fear for ourselves, our country, and our world: terrorism of many kinds, violence, political unrest, threats to the environment, financial difficulties, disease, interpersonal problems, natural disasters, and more. That's why we need to learn evermore that we are the children of God and what that means. And what we learn from Jesus appearing to His disciples that first Easter night and again the following week is the importance and necessity of God's people, Jesus' disciples, gathering around His Words and His wounds. For where Jesus is, there is peace.

Notice what we have here. Sunday. Disciples gathered. Doors shut. Jesus. The sight of His wounds in a living body. Overflowing joy. A commission to carry forgiveness out into the world. Sound familiar?

Unfortunately Thomas wasn't there that first night and he missed out. He missed the gathering and the mutual support of the other disciples. And most importantly, He missed the Lord Jesus. We don't know why he wasn't there and it really doesn't matter. What matters is that he wasn't there with the others. He wasn't there when Jesus appeared to them. He wasn't there to receive Jesus' gifts of peace and the Holy Spirit. He missed out on it all and he refused to believe the words of the other apostles.

So, unbelieving Thomas lays down his conditions. That's the way it is with unbelief. It lays down conditions for God to meet before you'll trust Him. Thomas says he must see the wounds with his own eyes and touch them with his own hands. Then maybe he'll believe.

So why didn't Jesus appear to Thomas during that week? Why did Jesus let Thomas remain in his unbelief for a whole week? For Thomas' benefit and ours.

Notice what happened the following week. Sunday. Disciples gathered. Doors shut. Jesus. The sight of His wounds. Overflowing joy. This time truant Thomas was present. And the presence of Jesus among the gathered disciples brings Thomas from unbelief to full-blast confession: "My Lord and my God!"

Alleluia! Thomas had been brought to faith by seeing. When he saw the wounds in Jesus' hands and side, he came to confess that his Lord and his God had been raised from the dead just as He had promised. Thus Jesus sets the pattern for His disciples, and He's thinking of more than Thomas on that second Sunday of Easter. He's thinking of you. And so He says to Thomas: "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

But if seeing doesn't bring you to faith, what does? The Gospel holds the answer. It's all about what happens on the First Day of the week, which is also the Eighth Day. It's the day that goes beyond our seven-day, regular week. On the First and Eighth Day, we have a miracle, a new creation. The disciples of Jesus gather. The Risen Lord comes into their midst. He comes with His wounds, His Spirit, His breath, *and* His words. "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."

So whenever Jesus' people gather for the Divine Service (whether on Sundays or any other time), the miracle happens again and again. While there's certainly more Jesus than can ever fit into a book, Jesus has given His people a book around which to gather. A book where the breath of Jesus—the breath that *is* the Spirit of God—still blows and calls from unbelief to faith. A book that is opened and read. Words are heard—concrete words; words about Jesus; Jesus' own words. The Spirit breathed them all. They come from Jesus, and they're all about Him. When we read them, we don't just remember our Lord. Instead, we confess that He is with us in His words. He still speaks to us! That's why we stand for the reading of the Gospel. That's why we sing out "Alleluia!" as we greet the One who comes to us in His words. After all, He has promised: "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him" (John 14:23).

Now the One who comes to us in His words also comes to show His wounds, speak peace, and bring joy. So when the words of Jesus are spoken over bread and wine, we have what those words promise: "This is my body, given for you. This is My blood, shed for you. For the forgiveness of sins." Thomas was invited to touch and believe. We are invited to taste and believe. Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good!

Body and blood remind us of Christ's wounds of course. After all, you only get body and blood separated from one another when there's a wound. So every time we gather at this holy Table we proclaim Jesus' death and resurrection, and the Resurrected One feeds us with His Body and His Blood.

Now, you can't see it from where you sit, but altars often have five little crosses adorn the fair linen which covers the altar—two on each end and one in the middle. They remind us of the wounds from which Jesus' blood flowed—two in His hands, two in His feet, and one in His side. Those crosses confess that what gets placed upon this altar is the very Body and Blood of Jesus that hung and died upon the cross for us. That's what our Risen Lord gives us to eat and to drink. And when we see and taste of the wounds, we also receive the word of peace: "The peace of the Lord be with you always." And then the joy: "Thank the Lord and sing His praise; tell ev'ry one what He has done!"

So it is that on the Lord's Day, Jesus comes into the midst of His gathered disciples, speaks His peace, brings the joy of sins forgiven, and calls from unbelief to faith. But the joy certainly doesn't end here.

The disciples go out and announce—as they did to Thomas, "We have seen the Lord." So we are sent out from this gathering where Jesus has come to be with us, where we have known Him in His words and in His wounds, in His Body and Blood. We are sent forth to tell people like Thomas—people who wallow in the sadness of thinking that death is the end of the road—that there is One who went farther than death. We are sent to tell people like Thomas—people who think that their sins still hang around their own necks—that there is One who Himself lifted that burden and carried it long ago to give them peace and joy. We are sent to tell one and all. And while we tell them that there is such a One, that there is such a forgiveness, that there is such an eternal life, we also tell them *where* this Risen One can be found, where faith is given, and where forgiveness and joy and peace may be had by all who come. We are sent to invite and bring them to the great gathering on the First Day and Eighth Day. After all, it's the Lord's Day when our Savior Jesus still comes to be with us as we gather together in His name, and around His words and His wounds. And so even now we live in the new creation He has come to bring, a new creation without fear of any kind. What could ever keep us away?

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