

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Easter 2A
April 16, 2023
John 20:19-31

Resurrection Peace

Jesus said to him, ". . . Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 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. (John 20:29-31 ESV)

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

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

When we hear today's Gospel, it's easy to get distracted from what is most important. For starters, there are the disciples hiding behind locked doors for fear of the Jews. They were sure that if the Jews had killed their Master, they would kill them too. Now it's easy to pick on them and wonder: Hadn't they learned anything from Jesus? Hadn't they seen the signs He'd done? Feeding the multitudes, healing the sick and afflicted, raising the dead. What more did they need? Didn't they listen to Him? Well, perhaps they did. After all, Jesus had told them that a student is not above his teacher. He had told them 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. Their real problem, though, was that their fear showed a lack of faith in Jesus and His Word. They refused to believe the message from the women that Jesus was alive. And if it's true, they were undoubtedly afraid of what Jesus would say or do to them for their acts of cowardice. Yes, it's easy to point fingers at the disciples.

But you're no better. You too are filled with fears of many kinds. And if you really thought that Jesus was here, you'd be afraid because you haven't lived as you should. You've lived as if you

mattered most. You've been afraid to bear witness for Jesus by word and by deed. So don't be so quick to point out their failings. Take the log out of your own eye first.

Oh, and then there's Thomas, you know, the doubting one. Again it's easy to pick on Thomas. 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 better or more important to do? We don't know. But we do know he refused to believe the disciples when they told him Jesus was risen and that they'd seen Him. He didn't just doubt, he steadfastly refused to believe until he had received the same evidence they had seen. He wouldn't believe until he not only saw the nail marks, but actually touched them.

Again, you're no better. You demand proof. The words spoken by God's sent one isn't enough. You need to see or touch, or at least feel it before you'll believe it. No, don't focus on Thomas either. For if you do, you'll get lost or distracted from what is most important, and that's that Jesus did rise from the dead, and did show Himself alive to His disciples.

You see, the disciples hadn't believed the women when they reported seeing Jesus alive. They didn't believe the two Emmaus disciples who reported they had seen Jesus alive. 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 His wounds and His words, which gave the peace they needed, they believed. And on that second night a week later, with Thomas now present, He does it again. He gives Thomas the proof he demanded. And Thomas could only declare, "My Lord and my God!" The proofs, the peace, the wounds, the Words, the faith were all gifts from Jesus to the disciples.

But there's more. Jesus gave them as witnesses of all these things. Jesus sent them to forgive and retain sins. And Pastors follow in that divine office. They proclaim the apostolic word which points to Christ and His saving work. They forgive the sins of the penitent. They retain, or bind, the sins of the impenitent as long as they do not repent. 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.

So blessed are you who have not seen and yet have believed. For 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. You are free to love and serve your neighbor without fear.

And, of course, Jesus is present in His Holy Supper as He gives us His very Body and Blood for the forgiveness of sins and to comfort, strengthen, nourish, console, encourage, and gladden the soul and fill us with joy as we 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."

That is what is most important. Jesus' death. Jesus' resurrection. Jesus' eternal reign. The means of grace that bring the benefits of Jesus' redemption to us today, and propel us toward our future home, and are our stay and confidence and peace and joy each day. For our Lord gives us exactly what those disciples received – a

resurrected and living Lord Jesus to forgive us, to give us His peace, to give us faith. He is our Savior who is with us always. The failings and foibles of the disciples are recorded in Scripture, not for our comparing or our self-aggrandizing, but for our learning. And so let us learn from them. Let us learn to touch the flesh of Jesus as it enters our lips, and declare with Thomas: My Lord and my God.

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