

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran church  
Pastor Mark Gartner  
Sermon for Easter 2 – April 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>, 2009

### **John 20:19-31**

<sup>19</sup>On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!”

<sup>20</sup>After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

<sup>21</sup>Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” <sup>22</sup>And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup>If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

<sup>24</sup>Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup>So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!”

But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.”

<sup>26</sup>A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” <sup>27</sup>Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

<sup>28</sup>Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

<sup>29</sup>Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” <sup>30</sup>Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. <sup>31</sup>But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

There are many unbelievable things that happened every day in our world. Many of them are hard to believe. Let me describe something that I find almost unbelievable. There are a group of people who look like they are cheerleaders who are practicing something new. There are 4 men and one young lady. It looks like any other routine that you might see on TV where they throw the lady up and catch her in their arms. That seems hard enough, but in this case the men throw the lady up in the air, and she does a back flip and then goes through the basketball hoop feet first and the men catch her in their arms. Just think about that for moment. A basketball hoop is only 18 inches in diameter. This lady was thrown in the air and did a flip and went through the hoop. That is pretty hard to believe and I have to admit I don't think I would have believed it until I saw the video. I needed to see proof before I knew it was true. The video in this case was the proof that I needed.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the keystone of our Christian religion. Without it our faith is useless and our message is an empty thing. How would people know for sure that Jesus had come out of the grave? That is exactly what we see in our text for today as Jesus gives visible proof that he was alive. On that first Easter evening, Jesus suddenly appeared to his disciples and demonstrated that He had risen indeed. He completely changed these fearful disciples into joyful children of God. Our Lord spoke words of eternal peace to them, and their sadness and fear was changed into divine peace. Let us consider these words of our risen Lord:

### **Theme: Peace Be With You!**

- 1. To the Ten on that first Sunday**
- 2. To Thomas a week later**
- 3. To all who need it today**

Last Sunday, Easter Sunday, millions and millions of Christians around the world raised their voices in hymns of joy and praise to our risen Savior. There is a reason why church attendance on Easter is higher than any other Sunday of the year: because Easter celebrates the most important event in history, the event that is fundamental to the Christian faith. And everyone who calls himself a Christian will want to be in God's house on Easter morning, praising him for raising Jesus from the dead. But the very first Easter Sunday wasn't shaping up to be a very joyous celebration at all, at least not for Jesus' disciples. They were gathered that evening behind locked doors, afraid that the soldiers who came for Jesus were soon coming for them. Even after some of the women had come that morning and told them about the empty tomb, and even reported seeing Jesus alive!, most of the disciples refused to believe it. It seemed impossible to them.

All that changed dramatically when Jesus appeared to them to bring them what they so desperately needed and couldn't find anywhere else: peace. The risen Christ appeared to them on Easter evening and calmed their doubts and fears as only he could do. That same risen Christ is here with us this morning to bring us the same peace he brought to his first disciples on that first Easter evening. In this sermon we're going to look at three different aspects of the peace that only the Risen Christ can bring.

The first and most important peace that the disciples needed was **peace with God**. Their relationship with God, right at that moment, was a little on the shaky side. After all, just three nights ago, on Thursday, they had all failed Jesus by allowing him to be arrested while they ran the other way. They kept a safe distance from their teacher and Lord for the next twenty-four hours, while he was tortured, beaten and finally killed. And even now, after they had been told by a group of Jesus' women disciples that morning that he was no longer in the tomb because he had risen from death, they were skeptical and disbelieving. They must have been questioning God, wondering if they had misplaced their faith in Jesus, wondering perhaps if he really was the Messiah, the Son of God at all. And maybe they questioned themselves, wondering if they had really done everything they could have, everything God wanted them to do, for their teacher and friend who was now dead. As far as they were concerned, there was no peace to be had.

That's when the risen Christ appeared among them, suddenly standing there in his glorious resurrection body which was no longer able to be kept out by a simple locked door. And he said to them, **"Peace be with you!"** Then **"he showed them his hands and side"**, proving that he was the same man they had known for years, the same man they had seen nailed to the cross, the same man they had seen die just three days before, and now, somehow, was alive again. By showing them his resurrected body Jesus was filling the hearts of these men with confidence in all the promises he had made to them during his ministry, promises that he would take care of their sins, once and for all, and do everything necessary to bring them back into a relationship with God. And so, that Easter evening, Jesus was giving them peace with their God for the first time in days.

This Easter season Jesus means to convince us all over again that his victory over death on Easter morning was a victory for all people, for all time. He wants us to be sure that our sins, which would forever separate us from our Holy God, have been completely paid for and taken out of the way, by Jesus' innocent death in our place, there on Calvary's cross. The risen Christ wants us to know that when he says, **"Peace be with you!"** he is giving us the peace of forgiveness, the peace of knowing our sins have been paid for, and knowing that even something as jarring and frightening as death can't separate us from God's love. Because we have peace with God.

Of course, no one proved that fact better than one of Jesus' own disciples who missed out on his Easter evening appearance. Thomas, the twin, was not with the others that first Easter evening. He didn't see, touch, and talk to the risen Lord as the others did, and as a result, he didn't receive the peace of mind they had. It was too much for him to believe that Jesus was truly back from the dead. **"Unless I see the nail marks in his hands,"** Thomas said, **"and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."**

Now, before we get too self-righteous about doubting Thomas, maybe we'd better take a good look in the mirror. Are there times when we doubt the clear promises of God in the Bible, just because we can't see how he could make that work? Jesus told us, **"Seek first God's Kingdom and his righteousness, and everything you need for this life will be given to you as well."** But we too often doubt that promise of God, and so give back to God only what we have left over after our needs and desires are taken care of. God tells us in the Bible, **"Don't worry about anything; just bring your wants and needs to God in prayer."** But we too often keep all our cares and concerns inside us and churn up our stomachs with worry, instead of turning our problems and fears over to God in prayer.

That's why it's such a comfort to see how the risen Christ dealt with Thomas's doubts. When he appeared to the disciples a week later, this time with Thomas present, Jesus again said to them, **"Peace be with you!"** Then he turned to Thomas and went right down his checklist: **"Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."** And, of course, Thomas did. He, too, now experienced the peace of mind which the others had had for the past week, because he had been convinced by the risen Christ. This peace gives us true confidence.

We also can be as confident as Thomas because through faith we have seen the Lord. Faith is that wonderful gift from God. It comes to us through the good news that God has forgiven our sins. And when God's love takes hold of our hearts, faith enables us to trust in Jesus Christ.

Faith is like a pair of eyes that see Jesus. Faith is a pair of eyes that see the tomb of Jesus with the stone rolled away. Faith is a pair of eyes that see Jesus is not there. Faith sees Jesus appear to Mary and the disciples. It sees the one who is victorious over our sin.

Faith is like having a pair of ears that can hear. It hears the angels declare, "He is not here he has risen just like he said. Come and see the place where he lay." Faith hears Jesus say, "Peace be with you" and "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." Faith hears Thomas declare, "My Lord and my God." Faith hears the disciples say, "We have seen the Lord." Faith hears our Savior declare, "It is finished."

Faith is like having hands. Faith can touch the grave clothes of Jesus and feel the cold stone where his body once lay. Faith can grab hold of the risen Savior's feet as we fall in worship. Faith can reach out and touch the place where the nail holes were and put its hand into Jesus' side. Faith can touch the one who died for sin.

Faith sees, hears, and feels its Savior, raised victoriously. And faith still sees today, still hears today, still touches today. Faith sees, hears and touches the very body and blood of Christ in, with and under the bread and the wine in Communion. Faith hears the words of the gospel spoken every Sunday. Faith announces as we sing the gospel in the liturgy, "O lord, our Lord, how glorious is your name in all the earth. Almighty God, merciful Father, you crown our life with your love. You take away our sin..." Faith believes.

We have seen the Lord: risen, alive. We have seen him with our faith. And we are blessed. But best of all we are confident in our salvation. Jesus rose to prove our sins have been forgiven, that we are right with God and that gives us confidence. We have seen the Lord and we are confident in our salvation. The confidence we have in our salvation means there's nothing to lose for sharing our faith.

St. John reports to us that Jesus said a second time to his disciples that night, **"Peace be with you!"** Now he wasn't just repeating himself, here. He was showing them the natural outcome of having peace with God deep down in their souls, they would want to share that message of peace with everyone they met. **"As the Father has sent me, I am sending you,"** Jesus told them, sending you with the promise of peace with God for all people. In other words, just as soon as they realized he was alive again, the risen Christ wanted his disciples to know that they would be the ones eventually to tell the world what they were in a unique position to have personally witnessed: the simple message that Jesus lived, died and rose again to bring all people peace with God.

**And with that,** John reports, **"Jesus breathed on them and said, Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."** That was how Jesus equipped his disciples for their peace-sharing mission. He shared with them his own

authority to let sincerely repentant sinners know they were completely forgiven, through the shed blood of Christ. And at the same time, he gave them his authority to announce to those who refuse to acknowledge and admit their sin a very frightening reality: you can have no peace with God, and no forgiveness for your sins, until you repent.

The risen Christ has given us a message of peace to share with our world as well. He has breathed out the same Holy Spirit on us, and given us the same privilege he gave to his first disciples: to announce the word of forgiveness and peace to penitent sinners, 'in place of and by the command of the Lord Jesus Christ,' just as if he were personally saying it himself. Of course, we must realize that the same key which unlocks the door of heaven to those who see their need and trust in God's mercy, must also be used by us at times to lock heaven's gates against those who refuse to admit their need for Jesus' shed blood. There can be no peace with God without humble repentance and faith.

Our risen Lord wants to wipe away our doubts and convince us of his love for us, as well. He wants us to rely completely on the witness of those who walked and talked with Jesus, and who saw him not only dead on the cross, but also alive again three days later. He wants us to be sure about the things we haven't seen, because he's proven his love to us in ways we have seen. In short, Jesus wants to give us what he gave Thomas a week after Easter: peace of mind to settle our doubting hearts.

Through the eye-witness accounts Jesus' first disciples have left us in the pages of the Bible, the risen Christ still today brings us peace:

- He assures us that we have peace with God because our sins are forgiven
- He sends us out to our neighbors to share the message of peace through faith in Jesus
- And he promises to remove all our doubts and fears and give us peace of mind, as we learn to trust his Word

May the peace of the resurrection fill your heart, today and every day. Amen.