

Prayer of the Day:

O risen Lord, you came to your disciples and took away their fears with your word of peace. Come to us also by Word and Sacrament, and banish our fears with the comforting assurance of your abiding presence; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Verse of the Day:

Alleluia. Alleluia. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. Alleluia. (John 20:29b)

Sermon Text:

Back to reality. I think maybe my parents said those words when we would get done with a vacation or a little time away and the regular everyday grind of work would begin again. If not them, then I know I picked it up from somewhere. Back to reality. It's what I think when something in the world jolts us out of our feelings of contentment and peace. Back to reality, yes after some time off and now the workload, usually piling up because you haven't been there to do it, demands attention. Back to reality after a break from school and now the homework, the events, the commitments come rolling in.

Here we are in the Sunday after Easter. Typically, it's one of the more lightly attended services of the year. All of the joy and exuberance of Easter, we had about 400 back in church on one day.

Sure that's less than years past but then Covid and all. I'm guessing this weekend we won't see that. Back to reality.

But then one wonders what was going through the minds of those disciples locked behind closed doors. Scripture tells us they were terrified of the Jews. But it didn't seem to bother them before, when Jesus was with them. For three years, He had been with them, teaching them,

Text: John 20:19-31

¹⁹ 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!" ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

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

²⁴ Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵ 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."

²⁶ 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!" ²⁷ 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."

²⁸ Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

²⁹ Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

³⁰ Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹ 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.

performing those miracles to amazing to even comprehend, refuting the pharisees and Sadducees at every turn. It was all too good to be true. Now He was gone, murdered. Back to reality. But then, then *Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"*²⁰ *After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.*

We discussed it before in sermons, but the Jewish concept of peace has always intrigued me. Americans tend to define peace by what it is not: it's the lack of war or strife, hatred or discord. Not so much the Hebrews mindset. Peace might best be described as a kind of harmony. Everything in its proper place. So the brick wall expertly laid every brick perfectly placed and the mortar joints all uniform in thickness and perfectly in line this is Shalom, this is peace. The opposite? Start swinging a sledgehammer until the wall is broken and lying in a pile rubble never to be reassembled again.

Too often, that's what our world feels like. That's what the world of those 11 disciples felt like. Everything was shattered. Everything was broken. Do you feel that way too? Maybe Covid hit you hard and you're still trying to recover from the mess it made of your health. Maybe the lockdowns and restrictions hit you hard and you're still trying to cope with all the changes that were imposed. Maybe the fear hit you hard and you simply don't know how anything can ever go back to normal and now that things are trying it's as terrifying as all the rest of it. Or maybe it has nothing to do with all of that. Maybe it's just that life has always been hard, always felt broken. Maybe it's some other reality that has seized the heart and left you feeling like a pile of rubble lying on the ground and then, then, Jesus steps in and says "*Peace be with you!*" and we want to be overjoyed, but we are more like Thomas. How? How can this be?

Dear friends, it's because Jesus has put everything back in its proper place. He has made peace between us and our God. That's what all that celebration and all those services pointed too. It's why Easter is so joyous. Jesus has accomplished your salvation! And that dear friends is a proven undeniable fact.

Ten men saw it with their own eyes! Ten men all of whom but one would die rather than deny that fact that their eyes had beheld Jesus out of the tomb walking around, doing the unthinkable once again. One man doubted! Thomas only strengthens the evidence though. Jesus appears again! Now eleven men see Him as He announces His peace again! This time invites Thomas to touch and see and the shattered wall of Thomas doubting heart is miraculously made whole. More will see. More will know. In the Sundays after Easter, we continue to behold the evidence of the new reality that Christ Jesus has produced for us. He is not dead, He is risen and because He is, we are saved. His perfection is our own! His blood has paid for our sin in full! His life, proof that God has accepted it all. Peace, harmony, is ours!

Easy to say right. I mean we haven't shoved our hands in the wounds. Though eleven men, 22 eyes beheld Him, I'm not one of them and my eyes haven't seen a thing and our world today, well let's just say a little concrete evidence to put the "nay sayers" to rest would really be a welcome sight.

Friends, Jesus has not forgotten you. In fact, you're here in this lesson today. *Jesus told him (again that's Thomas), "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."*

Times won't always be easy. Sometimes we'll deal with pandemics and all of the grime realities that they bring with them. Sometimes, it'll be hospital beds, hospice beds, beds filled with tears of regret and sorrow, sometimes it'll be the realities of life lived in a broken and shattered world, life lived dealing with those who are broken and shattered, Life lived with ourselves and the trouble and sorrow which sin causes, which I have caused.

Jesus doesn't forget you. He calls you blessed! Why? Because you believe this message. You believe that Jesus was crucified and risen for You and for the sin that rages in this world of ours. You believe that eleven men, who at least earthly speaking had nothing to gain and everything to lose saw Jesus and were willing to stake their lives on it. Others on a road, others gathered around at Jesus ascension, once a crowd of more than 500 laid their aching eyes on Him. You believe that's significant because Jesus brings peace, not the lack of bad stuff as we define it, but harmony between us and God which provides a hope dear friends. A hope that can carry us through the trial and tribulation of this world as we await the world to come. Hope which can fuel us for the task at hand as we announce real and lasting peace between us and God within this broken and shattered world of ours, until one day it finally is back to reality, back to the reality which Christ has won for us all and has given to us through faith, blessed us with in Word and in Sacrament where my hands have touched Him, more importantly where His hands have touched me as He took the rubble of our sinful hearts and reconstructed them once again. By God's Grace, John seemingly lifts His eyes from the page and looks right at us when he writes, ³⁰ *Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.* ³¹ *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.*

Ah dear friends, when the world would leave us feeling doubtful, hopeless, broken, just wanting to run away and lock the doors for fear that it all might follow us in, in short when you are feeling like a disciple of Jesus. Well, run back to His Word, **PEACE BE WITH YOU! JESUS HAS ACCOMPLISHED YOUR SALVATION! JESUS GRANTS IT ALL TO US THROUGH FAITH! AMEN!**