

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.

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:

Can you imagine what life must have been like for those disciples locked behind closed doors that first Easter morning? They were no doubt still trying to just comprehend it all. They had gone from heroes to outcasts in a matter of days. Consider just the change in the cries of Palm Sunday and then those of Friday morning. For years they had been traveling with Jesus, watching the miracles listening to the teachings as the crowds gathered around. Now, they were hiding behind locked doors for fear of the Jews. Life was so suddenly upside down that even the announcement of the women and the news from Peter and John hadn't much changed this new reality. Of course, all of that would soon change as Jesus stood among them and spoke, "**PEACE BE WITH YOU!**"

There is a huge temptation which accompanies this particular lesson each year. We can cast aside the 8th Commandment all together and begin to rail against the complete lack of faith which we see in the actions of not just Thomas, who demanded his empirical evidence but all the disciples who so easily forgot everything Jesus had been teaching them when the bombs in life began to explode. It's easy to do and we wouldn't be entirely wrong as we pointed out the weakness of their faith in this instance.

However, what would be entirely wrong headed is to pretend that the very same temptation doesn't regularly claim us. Pull yourselves for a moment out of this Easter narrative and plop back down into the realities of our world. Do you find yourselves complaining a lot these days? If so what is it about? Could it be the rapid movement away from the so called Christian worldview (if it ever really was entirely Christian in the first place)? Or how about the speed at which our society has seemingly forgotten about the sanctity of life or the respect we are to have for it as more and more people are treating each other like animals, even as they act like them themselves? And why do we complain about all of this? Is it not a little bit of fear, as if God can't truly be victorious unless the world is on His side? So we have a tendency to be quiet, to shut ourselves up and lock ourselves behind the imaginary doors of lives as if they could protect us, when we are unsure about the power of God.

So in walks Jesus, 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."*

As is usually His way, God cuts right through all of our sinful sniveling and reminds us of reality. God is not powerless. In fact, He has conquered the most fearsome foes of them all. Satan it turns out did not win. He failed to muster enough strength in this world to claim the life of Jesus. He couldn't win because in reality, Jesus was stronger even than death, so Satan couldn't rid the world of God. So His work is complete after all. Sin is conquered in holy precious blood spilt for us and our salvation. Life eternal is granted in the perfect life Jesus lived for us. Heaven is ours eternally.

Oh, I get it, there are still doubts and fears. It can be difficult to think we are victorious when the world around us seems to be raging on unchecked. That's Thomas right, seeing is believing. So the facts of resurrection are once again presented to us. There He is again, passing through walls "*Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.*"

It's all enough to change fear into joy in the hearts of the disciples and why? Because Jesus is risen. He is Risen indeed! Alleluia! And that means something, dear friends. It means even when the times look impossible and the world seems to be going to hell in a handbasket, evil can't win. Even when it does its worst and afflicts us with illness and heartache and one day closes our eyes in death, it has won nothing. Because we cannot be defeated, we stand with Jesus forever in heaven. Turns out the very thing that looked like defeat in the eyes of the world, as Jesus hung lifeless on the cross, was pure victory as He stands triumphant Easter morning. As he announces the peace, He Himself has purchased and won for us.

That kind of changes the way we look at those complaints of our then too, does it not? That world that rages on out there, do we need to fear it? Of course not ... in fact, it needs our help. You see as the world around us rapidly loses the knowledge of God, fear grows in its heart too. Still evil, still sinful, still dying from sins consequences it writhes and wishes to find some door that can hold the condemnation out and quiet the conscience, but nothing ever really does. So, Jesus urges us go and destroy sin, do it with the very forgiveness I have given you. Stand up in the world and announce real peace. Not something won by bombs and guns or tenuous treaties signed with fancy pens, but the peace of knowing the sin is forgiven and therefore life and salvation truly belong to us. This is the peace the world cannot give, but which it craves, which it needs and for which it longs.

Ah, when life seems upside down and we sit scratching our heads "*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.*" When fear seizes our hearts and all would seem lost, Jesus reminds us once again of why He came, once more lets us see the proof, once more consoles us, **PEACE BE WITH YOU!** Amen!