

Sunday: Second Sunday of Easter

Date: April 11, 2021

Text: John 20:19-31

Title: Bringing Peace

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Please pray with me.

The beloved disciple writes in his Gospel, “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 . . .” (John 20:19a). That Sunday evening in the upper room must have been filled with emotions and confusion, fear and self-doubt, anger and grief. The disciples had gathered together to support each other. The last few days had become a blur in their minds. Thursday evening started with celebrating the highest feast in the Jewish tradition. Then the trip to the Mount of Olives and the Garden of Gethsemane. Everything was going so well. Jesus was the object of worship and he had a huge following. Now must be the time for the new kingdom.

Things happened so fast. Judas meets them with Temple guards and soldiers. Jesus is arrested, bound, and led off to stand before the chief priests and Roman authorities. The man they had followed for three years, who taught with authority, who healed the sick, who cast out demons and who stood in the place of God forgiving sins, was tortured, abused, mocked, and crucified. The One they thought was going to be the Redeemer of Israel, was killed. His lifeless body placed in a tomb near the place where he hung on the tree.

The Sabbath was observed in shock and sadness. Nothing made sense. Just six days earlier, Jesus was welcomed as a hero, the King of Israel. The crowds lined the roadway and cried out “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” (Matthew 21:9). How could things have turned so dramatically and so quickly. And what are they to make of the man who they acknowledged as the Messiah, the Christ of God. Their rabbi who taught them daily was gone. What about all the things that he taught them?

And then there were the Jews who turned so radically on Jesus. Would they be coming for them next? Was it safe in the city? Hiding behind a locked door might

work for a day or three, but eventually they would have to emerge and face the very people who cried “Crucify Him” in the courtyard of Pilate.

On top of all this, the disciples had to be in mourning. The life they had lived for three years with Jesus was gone. The man they loved and committed to fight for, was gone. The foundation of their life was washed away in a flood of hatred and violence. Struggling with the emotions of grief and loss; faced with questions about their actions; and besieged with visions of Jesus’ crucifixion and death they were on the verge of breaking down.

Then on Sunday morning, the first day of the week, reports began coming in that the tomb was empty. Mary and others reported an angel telling them he has risen. Peter and John witnessed the empty tomb. They returned to the others and related what they had seen. No one knew what to make of all of this. The body gone. Did someone take it? Was it the Jewish leaders? Was it the Roman authorities? What about the angel saying he had risen? All of these thoughts running through their heads.

Then there is the guilt they were experiencing because of their actions on Thursday evening. They all ran away. They abandoned Jesus, just as he said they would. They had all said they would stay and fight to the end with him, but they fled when he was led off in captivity. Would things have turned out differently if they had stood with him? As all these thoughts swirled around in their heads, they felt the weight of their sins, sins of commission and sins of omission.

As they cowered in the upper room that Easter evening, wallowing in their sin, guilt and despair, Jesus enters the room. Though the doors were locked, John tells us, “Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you.” (John 20:19b-21a).

Jesus brought to the disciples the gift of peace. Not just any ordinary peace, but the peace that originates and flows from the verdict of justification that flows from the throne of heaven. The verdict by which the sinner is justified in heaven is now spoken by the mouth of the Lord on earth: “Peace to you.” Jesus has been given all authority in heaven and on earth, and for the sinner, that is the good news of the Gospel brought to earth. Jesus has forgiven their sins. Though they are still sinners, by God’s grace they are saints in the new kingdom.

There is the gift of the Holy Spirit, who “calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith” (Small Catechism, Third Article).

There is the gift of forgiveness of sins. The forgiveness is a spoken and accomplished fact, delivered into the ears of the sinner. The sin is sent away; it is no more.

Faith is, in this room, the negation of fear. The fear brought on by the Law (which accuses of sin) is now replaced by the faith wrought by the Gospel (which frees us from sin).

It should probably be noted that just seeing Jesus in the resurrected flesh as victor over death would not chase away their fear. What if he is in the flesh, victorious, but looking for retribution? The resurrection is not good news simply in that it shows God has this power. But he came in the flesh for grace John tells us in 1 John 1:16-17. He was resurrected for us. He came into the room to speak forgiveness. He came bearing gifts. Faith receives these gifts.

As Jesus declares Peace to the disciples, he forgives and restores them. No longer need they wallow in fear and self-doubt. They are restored to a right relationship with God the Father and confirmed in their place in the kingdom of heaven.

He comes to the disciples on Easter evening and again a week later when Thomas was present as well, he brings with him the kingdom of heaven. He gives himself to the disciples in person. He shows them the marks of his sacrifice for them. His hands, his feet, and his side bear the wounds of his crucifixion. By these marks, by his stripes they were healed and forgiven.

The Smalcald Articles, one of our foundational confessional documents, states, “God is superabundantly generous with His grace: First, through the spoken Word, by which forgiveness of sins is preached in the whole world. Second, through Baptism. Third, through the holy Sacrament of the Altar. Fourth, through the Power of the Keys. Also, through the mutual conversation and consolation of brethren” (SA III IV).

Where the Gospel is preached, where sins are forgiven by the crucified, resurrected Lord, there is resurrection for the sinner. “For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation” (Small Catechism, Sacrament of the Altar).

As we continue our celebration of Easter this Second Sunday in Easter, we look at the actions of our resurrected Lord and Savior, as he comes in search of his lost sheep. The disciples, mired in the guilt and shame of their sins were lost, but Jesus by His word restored them. “Peace to you.”

In the same way, Jesus comes in search of you and I his lost sheep. We are every bit as guilty of sin as the disciples. We forsake our Lord every time we decide to do something we know is wrong. We turn away from Jesus when we put ourselves ahead of Him. Our broken human nature, corrupted by the fall into sin by Adam and Eve, draws us away from Christ. Satan plays on our selfish motives and desires to cause us to fall into sin and then wallow in it.

The result of our sin is to lead us to hide behind locked doors. We cower in fear of a wrathful and righteous God. We harbor thoughts in our heads that we are not able to truly be forgiven. We are afraid that when Jesus comes to us, he will be an angry resurrected Messiah, who will punish us for our behaviors.

It is in this time of doubt and self-loathing, that we need to look at Jesus as he enters the upper room that Easter evening. Jesus does not come to extract a pound of flesh for our disobedience. Jesus comes to announce, “Peace to you.” Jesus brings his sacrifice to satisfy the wrath of God, to you and to me. Our Lord comes to seek and to save, not to condemn the world. Paul expresses it so eloquently in Ephesians 2 saying,

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the son of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind. But God being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace, you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we

are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them (2:1-10).

Jesus comes to you and me in our weakest moments. He comes to us when we are struggling with sin and despair. He comes to us as we lament our fallen condition. He comes to us as we repent of our sins. He comes to us even though we are covered in the muck and mud of sin. Jesus comes to you and to me.

As we gathered here today, we called upon Jesus along with the Father and the Holy Spirit to be with us. And they obliged us. As we heard the Word of God read, God was present and was entering our bodies through our ears. As we sang hymns, God was giving voice to his grace and mercy through us. As we gather for Holy Communion this morning, Jesus physically joins with us and feeds us His body and blood. We share in the atonement of Christ's sacrifice on the cross as we partake of the bread and the wine, the real body and true blood of Jesus. In this meal, the forgiveness of sins and the assurance of our salvation is for you. Jesus comes to us not as a victorious resurrected Jesus, seeking retribution or pouring out punishment. Instead, He comes as the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, pouring out grace and mercy upon us. He comes saying "Peace to you."

As you are dismissed from the Sacrament of Holy Communion, hear the words of peace spoken, just as if spoken by Jesus, "Depart in Peace" knowing that through Christ you have peace with the Father. Your sins are forgiven, you are loved by God and an heir of the kingdom of heaven.

Amen.