

John 20:19-20

April 7, 2024

"Peace...Peace be with you." These are the first words the disciples hear from their Risen Lord. Not once, but twice He says this to them. *"Peace be with you."* These words may not be what they are expecting to hear from Him. It's Easter evening. The disciples have locked themselves in. The last few days have been exhausting for them. They have probably had little, if any sleep. We can imagine the guilt and shame they have after fleeing from Jesus in His darkest hour. They had promised to be loyal and stand by Him. Nope, they all failed miserably. We can be certain the disciples are not singing Easter hymns, nor sitting down to enjoy an Easter meal. Their Lord was crucified. Are they next to feel the nails? They're scared. They're confused. They are a mess.

Suddenly, Jesus stands in their midst and He opens His mouth to speak. Had they had time to think about it, they likely would have expected Him to scold them, a scathing rebuke with a lot of anger in His voice. It's what they deserve. They are a bunch of disloyal, shameful, sinful followers. If they can even be called followers. More like leavers, for they all left Him.

"Peace," they hear, *"Peace be with you."* And with these words, Jesus shows them His hands and His side.

Now you may know this, or maybe not, but this text in John 20 is always the Gospel reading for the Sunday that follows Easter. This text, in other words, has been preached to death, if we can call it that, and possibly some do. But there's a reason for this, probably many reasons. And one that jumps out at me is that it speaks to me, to us, exactly where we are in our lives.

What do I mean by this? Easter was one week ago. How did last week go for you? Beautifully? No problems whatsoever? No arguments, no worries, no sins even worth mentioning, no sadness, no tears, no fears; your week could not have been better, right?

Well, then, why are you here? If this describes your week, and perhaps that is a typical week for you, then I don't know who you are, except that you are not human. You want to see human? These poor, frightened disciples behind locked doors. That's human.

We are not supermen and superwomen. We do not handle all the problems that come into our lives with the greatest of ease. There are days, even weeks, and maybe last week was one of them, when we feel at least a little like these disciples behind locked doors.

Fear put them there. Sometimes our fears and our worries lock us into ourselves, away from others. Sometimes a crushing blow can do this, when life just simply goes hayward. And more often than not, it's our sinfulness that does this, and even one specific sin that bothers us greatly. It shuts us in, and we lock the doors around us.

There are people, Christian people, who lock the doors to their church. Not to others, to themselves. It's not that they do not feel the need to go. It's their sins, and the guilt they have, and shame. They do not feel worthy of coming into the House of the Lord.

I'm thinking that this is where the disciples are at. Feeling pretty unworthy; pretty certain that the Lord is very upset with them.

“Peace...Peace be with you.” In the midst of these frightened disciples, in the midst of all the struggles they are wrestling with, Jesus appears, and from His lips comes not a severe rebuke, but forgiveness, pure mercy. The last thing the disciples expect to hear is the first thing they hear. Their Lord is not angry with them. He has not come to reprimand them but to comfort them, to forgive them.

This is one very good reason for having this Gospel text in our own ears every year following Easter. Easter Sunday is a high. We’re way up here. But human beings are rollercoasters. Have you noticed? We’re up, we’re down, over and over. And after being way up on Easter, well, we need Jesus as much as His disciples did.

These doors are not locked this morning, and we have not gathered here because we are afraid of the Jews like they were. But whatever it is that has brought you here, Jesus has a good word for you, and it is the same word He gave His disciples: *“Peace...Peace be with you.”*

Now maybe this is not the word you expect to hear. Maybe you expect to hear a word of rebuke. And it is true that God’s accusing Law is a scathing word. A word we sinful creatures dare not ignore.

But today you are here with Jesus’ disciples behind locked doors. And if the problems of last week rebuked you, if your fears and worries gave you grief, and if your sins, shame, and guilt took you from Easter’s high down into the depths, what you need is what Jesus here gives you: the comforting word of peace.

He has nothing against you, my friend. A condition of peace exists between God and you. The last battle was fought on the cross. You want proof? The marks in Jesus’ hands and side. These marks have not vanished over time. They are still there, and they will always will be. Every day of your life, my friend, Jesus shows these marks not to His disciples, but to your Heavenly Father, and to Him He says: Father, I died for this, My dear child. See the marks in My hands and side? Forgive him, dear Father, forgive her, for My blood was shed for this dear child of Mine.

And those same marks Jesus shows you in the Sacraments. Your baptism into His death and resurrection, His body and blood for you at this altar...here are the signs and seals, His pledge to you that for you He was crucified, and for you He was raised on the Third Day.

The word Jesus has for you is that of peace, grace, mercy, forgiveness. His Father, your Heavenly Father, does forgive you. Not because of anything in you, or anything you did. Because of Jesus, He forgives you. Because of the marks in His hands and side.

The word of peace, of forgiveness is for each and every one of you today and every day. Three times in our text Jesus gives this word to His disciples. Twice on Easter evening, and again the following Sunday when Thomas is with them. And this same word of peace, of forgiveness, is given to you every time you gather here with your fellow disciples.

And so, come. Come with your fears and worries. Come with your tears and grief. Come with your sins, guilt, and shame. These doors are never locked to you. Jesus is always here with His word: *“Peace...Peace be with you.”* Amen.