

John 20:19-31

Christ is risen! (He is risen indeed!) What does this mean? For Jesus' disciples it meant huddling together in fear. They had just celebrated Easter. Well, perhaps they hadn't sung any Easter hymns yet. And they had not gathered in joy around the Sacrament of the Lord's body and blood. But they had been to the empty tomb. And they had heard the reports of the women that Christ was risen. And so, on Easter evening, what did the event of Christ's resurrection mean for them? It meant hiding behind locked doors in fear.

What does Easter mean for you? It must mean something—you came back for more. You weren't content to follow the way of most and warm a pew for just a sunrise service. You're here in church a week later—to sing more Easter hymns; to hear again the Word of the Living Christ; to gather around His body and blood; to receive His peace. What does Easter mean for you? To be perfectly honest...it means the same thing it meant for those disciples—hiding in fear behind locked doors.

Yes, that's right—like those disciples, we who have heard the message of Easter, spend our days in hiding, closing ourselves in; maybe not behind wooden or steel doors—doors of sin and guilt; doors of resentment and bitterness; doors of haughty pride. We refuse to let certain people into our lives because we think we're better than them, or we're angry at them. We even try to shut God out. We don't open His Bible regularly because we think we know it well enough. We listen selectively when His Word is preached—shutting out those parts that don't agree with our way of thinking, that make us feel uncomfortable.

What a life! Living behind locked doors, afraid. Those disciples of Jesus were afraid of the Jews, afraid of bodily harm. They were also afraid of God. They had abandoned Him in the garden. They had denied Him. They had done just the opposite of what a Christian would do. Surely He was angry with them. They deserved to be punished severely.

We abandon God too. We forsake His ways to live how we think is best for us. We deny Him by not speaking up for His truth. We put ourselves first. There are some who are too afraid to step foot in His house. They don't want to hear His angry words. They want to live their life as they please, and don't want to hear what God has to say about it. That kind of fear lives in all of us. For we all live selfishly, and like those disciples, we'd rather lock ourselves in and shut God out, than be faced with the truth.

But God will not be shut out. Jesus came and stood in the midst of His disciples. He had not come to rebuke them. He had not come to punish them. He had come to bring peace. "Peace be with you," He said. And He showed them His hands and His side.

Now usually a scar is not a good thing. It may be the result of an accident or a surgical procedure. A scar may signify weakness and failure. But not the scars in Christ's hands and side. The scars of the nails and the spear are the marks of His Office. They speak of victory—victory over sin and death.

Anyone who has fought in a war can tell you that peace comes at a cost. When soldiers return home having secured the peace between nations who were at war, those soldiers bear the cost of that peace in their own bodies—wounds and scars, missing arms, missing legs. On the cross, Jesus fought the battle to bring peace between God and man, and the marks of

the nails and spear show the price He paid to win that peace. His bitter sufferings and death meant peace for all sinners.

And so He comes to His frightened disciples and it is the word of peace, the word of His victory over sin, that He gives them. Jesus speaks that same word to you. He does not come here to punish you for your sins. He comes here to forgive you. He comes to set your heart at peace announcing that God is at peace with you. And He doesn't just tell you of that peace—He gives you that peace. For as you eat His body and drink His blood, it is the Risen Christ Himself you are receiving. And He always brings with Him the gifts of peace that He won for all sinners.

And now that Jesus purchased peace for all, His disciples were to go out and give that peace to sinners. “As the Father has sent Me,” He said, “I also send you.” An Apostle is one who is sent out with purpose. They are to go out and carry with them the message of peace. And they did so—and so do those who follow after them. “Peace be with you.” You heard those words again this morning as your pastor, who follows in the train of the Apostles, declared to you: “I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” You did not see the marks of the nails in my hands, but they were there in the words. Your sins are forgiven you. How? Why? Because Jesus was nailed to a cross for you. Therefore, God is at peace with you. He is not angry at you. There is nothing but peace in His heart toward you. You cannot see the marks of the nails and spear, but they are there in the words of peace for you.

In fact, if they were not there, there would be no peace. Without the nails, there would be no forgiveness. Without the wounds in Jesus' flesh, your God would still be angry at you. But the scars are there in His hands and side, and His words declare it to be true. There is peace, He said. God is at peace with all sinners because of My scars—“Peace be with you.”

Now on that evening of Easter we know that Thomas was not with them. And his words of unbelief mark him as a man without faith: “Unless I see...I shall not believe.” Friend, do you have a Thomas in your life? A friend or loved one who needs to hear Jesus' word of peace? Bring him with you to where Jesus' disciples gather. For Christ comes to His people to give His word of peace. A week later they met again, and this time Thomas was with them. And again Jesus appears to them and says, “Peace be with you.”

And that, dear friends, is a picture of the church. Let's face it, those disciples gathered there were a sorry looking group of people—weak, scared. In there was a man named Peter who had denied his Lord three times. In that group was a man named Thomas who refused to believe in the Risen Christ. Everyone in that group of sinners was carrying with him a heavy conscience, a load of guilt, a life of shame. But Christ appears. He gives them peace. He forgives their sins. And that is the church. And that is us today.

For not one of us can be proud of our past life. Not one of us has the right to boast of how strong in the faith we are. We are all weak. We are all carrying with us guilt, and shame, and doubts. There are “Peters” among us. There are “Thomas's” among us. But we are the church, for Christ is among us in His Word and Sacraments. And He is here to forgive us, to give us peace. He is here to calm our fears, to comfort our troubled heart. We weak, scared, sinful people are the church, for Christ is here with His gifts of peace. He releases you from your sins. He removes from you the punishment you deserve. And this is where

we come to receive peace. When Thomas came the next Sunday, Jesus turned him into a man of faith. Invite your “Thomas’s” here next week. For you know that though we are a pitiful bunch of sinners, Christ comes here to give peace.

We have a number of wild kittens who come around looking for food. And it’s food that we give them—table scraps which they eagerly devour. At first they would always run away whenever we would open the back door to feed them. But the more they realized that we meant them no harm, but that we only gave them good things to eat, the closer they would come to us when we tossed out our scraps. The fear in their hearts is slowly being replaced by peace.

And that is us. When the doors to God’s house are open, there is no need for us to run the other way. He means us no harm. He is here to feed us with His body and blood. He is here to forgive our sins. He will never stop coming here to give us that peace. And like those cats, the more He feeds us, the more we trust Him, and the more often we desire to come here to be with Him.

And where we had only a few wild cats at first, and now we have many more, so through you, God spreads His word of peace to others—to “Peter’s” and “Thomas’s” out there; to poor frightened sinners who are starving for God’s peace. And you know where the food is. You know where Christ is—where there is forgiveness, and life, and salvation. Whenever you come here, whoever you are—here, in the words that show you the scars of the nails and spear—here there is peace. For here Christ tells you, “Friend, go in peace, your sins are forgiven.” Amen.