

A few weeks ago, our Gospel account told us about Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. He was lifeless. He was sealed up in a tomb. He did not move; Jesus did, toward him. He did not speak; Jesus spoke to him. All the action, all the verbs belonged, not to Lazarus, but to Jesus.

As I read our Gospel account for today from John 20, we see little difference between the two accounts. Jesus' disciples are not dead, but they do appear to be lifeless. They are not sealed up in a tomb, but they have closed their doors and locked themselves in like it was a tomb.

And did you notice, when I read this account, that all the verbs belong to Jesus? His disciples don't move; He moves toward them. He appears in their midst. The disciples don't speak; He speaks to them. We are told that the disciples are glad, but it's because Jesus acts to show them the marks of the nails and the spear in His hands and His side. We naturally assume that the disciples are breathing, though it doesn't say so, but we are told that Jesus does breathe. He breathes out the Holy Spirit upon them. And then He delivers to them the authority to forgive sins, just like with Lazarus, Jesus commanding him to be unbound from what was binding him: his stinking, wretched burial cloths.

Here on Easter Sunday evening, in the account from John 20, the story of Jesus giving life to Lazarus is repeated as He comes to His disciples. And listen to this... That story is repeated every Sunday when sinners gather together for the Divine Service. Call yourself Lazarus, or call yourself one of these disciples on Easter evening. It's the same thing. Because Jesus comes both times to give life to those who are lifeless. To give peace and forgiveness to those who are fearful, and all bound up and locked up.

What's happened in your life since last Sunday? Well, look at these disciples. Seven days before Easter they were different men. Life was pretty good. It was Palm Sunday. People were cheering. God was on their side obviously.

But then Monday came, and Tuesday, and move forward to Maundy Thursday and to Good Friday, and everything changed. Jesus was arrested. Judas betrayed Him. The disciples all fled in Gethsemane. Peter denied his Lord. Jesus was put to death on a cross. And now the disciples are hiding. They have guilt, remorse, regret, and great fear. They are not much different from Lazarus who was sealed up in a tomb.

I don't know, maybe you have had a better week than they had. Or maybe not. Perhaps you are not hiding here today in fear as they were. Your stress level may not be as high as theirs was. But I do know that each day of every week takes its toll on us. We live in the same sinful world as they did. We have the same evil foe after us. And we have the same sin living in us as did they. You may not be afraid of the Jews as they were. But there is plenty in our world, and plenty in us, which can strike fear in our hearts.

People, and even some Christians, think that Sunday worship is what we do. But no, to understand our Sunday Divine Service we need to look at Lazarus in the tomb and at the

disciples behind locked doors. Jesus acts. Jesus speaks. Jesus breathes out the Holy Spirit. Jesus gives life. Jesus unbinds and forgives sins. It's all Jesus. Lazarus and the disciples are those who receive what Jesus gives.

And so with you. Jesus is here today as He was at the tomb of Lazarus and as He was with the disciples behind locked doors. And He is not here to strike fear in your hearts, or to bind you up with burdens. Rather, He is here to release you of your fears, your burdens, and from everything that has zapped the life out of you.

He gave life to Lazarus, and in a very real way, He gave life back to His fearful disciples. He spoke to them the word of peace. And He showed them why God is at peace with them – the marks in His hands and His side.

They needed this assurance, and so do we. And so, look at the Holy Supper on the altar for you. Here are the marks of the nails and the spear. For here is Jesus' body crucified on the tree, and here is the blood that flowed from the wounds in His hands, feet, and side.

Do you understand? God is at peace with you. The war is over. The battle against sin, death, and hell has been fought. Jesus' death ended it. And Jesus resurrection sealed the victory. Are you not baptized into His death and resurrection? Then you have won the war because Jesus fought the battle for you.

God is not angry at you on account of your sins. He forgives you. Not just your little sins. All of them. Even your secret sins. Even those sins that are too awful to speak of. You are forgiven. Each one of you is forgiven.

As Jesus released Lazarus from his stinking, wretched burial cloths, and as He released the disciples from their guilt, remorse, and fear, so He releases you from everything that has sealed you up and taken the life out of you.

And it's because it's Sunday. You are here in the Divine Service. Jesus is here. And the verbs belong to Him. He acts. He speaks. He breathes. He forgives. And you can now depart in peace. Amen.