

2nd Sunday of Easter
April 7, 2024
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
John 20:19-31

John 20:19-31 (EHV)

On the evening of that first day of the week, the disciples were together behind locked doors because of their fear of the Jews. Jesus came, stood among them, and said to them, "Peace be with you!" ²⁰*After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. So the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.* ²¹*Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you! Just as the Father has sent me, I am also sending you."* ²²*After saying this, he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit.* ²³*Whenever you forgive people's sins, they are forgiven. Whenever you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."*

²⁴*But Thomas, one of the Twelve, the one called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came.* ²⁵*So the other disciples kept telling him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands, and put my finger into the mark of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will never believe."* ²⁶*After eight days, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them. "Peace be with you," he said.* ²⁷*Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and look at my hands. Take your hand and put it into my side. Do not continue to doubt, but believe."* ²⁸*Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"* ²⁹*Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."*

³⁰*Jesus, in the presence of his disciples, did many other miraculous signs that are not written 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.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

The ancient Greek epic poem "Odyssey," tells about the amazing adventures of Odysseus. Ten years of war have ended and Odysseus is ready to return home. Ten more years of adventures await as he makes his way back to his wife and family. The exciting parts of the story are the adventures. The theme of the story is getting back to your own home and family. It is a common theme among adventure stories. JRR Tolkien's "Lord of the Rings" books tell of little Hobbits going on great adventures. But they always want to be home in the peaceful Shire. Or maybe you think of stories told on the silver screen. The good stories have people who did not seek adventure, going on adventures in order to return to normal life. They want peace. They desire safety. They want to be at home and with family or at least make it possible for others to enjoy a peaceful, normal life again.

While there is a small percentage of people in the world who like to live a life of adventure and chaos, the vast majority of us prefer peace, safety, and stability. The Hebrew word, shalom, is a great word for this peace. It not only means the opposite of war and fighting. It also means safety. It includes the idea of good health. Shalom includes prosperity, that you have all you need for body and life. Shalom peace is what we desire too. It is what we need. It is what Jesus provides to his disciples on Easter evening and to us through his greeting, "Peace be with you."

The Proof

On the evening of that first day of the week, the disciples were together behind locked doors because of their fear of the Jews. Jesus came, stood among them, and said to them, "Peace be with you!" ²⁰*After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. So the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord...* ²⁴*But Thomas, one of the Twelve, the one called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came.* ²⁵*So the other disciples kept telling him, "We have seen the Lord!" But*

he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands, and put my finger into the mark of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will never believe." ²⁶After eight days, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them. "Peace be with you," he said. ²⁷Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and look at my hands. Take your hand and put it into my side. Do not continue to doubt, but believe." ²⁸Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

These men had been with Jesus for three years. They were privileged to hear the most words from his lips. They got to witness the most miracles. They were taught the most directly as Jesus explained parables to them and even told them again and again that he would suffer, die and rise on the third day. But there was little peace in the locked room on Sunday evening. Even though some had claimed to see Jesus alive outside the tomb that day already, the disciples were scared. Perhaps they were really hoping that Jesus was alive, but they could not allow themselves to believe it yet. So, they locked the doors and waited in fear for whatever was to happen next.

Whether we have been Christians for 10 months, 10 years or going on 100 years, we can still fall into fear when living in this world. We might still attempt to lock the doors and sit in fear when life is difficult. Perhaps a medical diagnosis or decision has taken away the peace in life. Conflict at work or home can take the peace away in life. Watching too much news can fill our heads with thoughts of disasters and dangers and take away peace. And soon we can become grumpy and grouchy while we mope around making other people's lives a bit more miserable to match ours.

There is a story told about a time Martin Luther was in one of these moods. He was moping around and had no peace in his life. His wise wife, Katie Luther, put on black clothing as if she was in mourning for a funeral. When Martin saw her, he asked who died. She cleverly responded that God must be dead since Martin had been acting in the way he had. He got the message.

The disciples got the message too. But they required more than the wise words and actions of a loving wife. They needed some proof that Jesus was alive before they would receive the peace he promised them in his greeting. The marks of the nails in his hands and the mark of the spear in his side were the proof Jesus showed. This is the same Jesus who was crucified. This is not a spirit or ghost or vision or dream. This is not an imposter trying to trick the disciples. This is the same Jesus who died and was buried.

Thomas was not so easily swayed to believe. He would not believe the other disciples' testimony. He had to see and touch Jesus himself. Here we see Jesus' compassion for the most stubborn among us and for all of us at our most stubborn moments. Jesus comes back the next week in the same way and gives Thomas the proof he wanted. The same Jesus who was attached to a cross with nails through his hands was very much alive in front of Thomas. The same Jesus who was proved to be dead with the spear of a Roman soldier is standing in front of Thomas. He has the marks of death but is alive.

John, the author of this Gospel, also wrote Revelation. In chapter 5 he describes seeing Jesus, the Lamb near the throne of heaven as, "The Lamb seemed to have been slain" (Rev 5:6). Even in heaven, the marks of the nails remain. The proof of his payment for sins remains. The same Jesus who was crucified is bodily alive forever and ever for you and for me.

The Peace

This Jesus is the promiser and deliverer of peace.

Jesus came, stood among them, and said to them, "Peace be with you!" ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. So the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you! Just as the Father has sent me, I am also sending

you.”²² After saying this, he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”²³ Whenever you forgive people’s sins, they are forgiven. Whenever you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.” ...²⁶ After eight days, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them. “Peace be with you,” he said...³⁰ Jesus, in the presence of his disciples, did many other miraculous signs that are not written 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.

Jesus connects the peace he brings with the forgiveness of sins and John connects the peace Jesus brings with “life in his name.” Forgiveness of sins and life eternal are the promises delivered by Christ’s resurrection from the dead. These results of the resurrection deliver peace to those who have not seen the resurrected Christ and yet believe.

Peace starts with forgiveness of sins. When our sins trouble us, when we wonder what God thinks of us, when the sins of our past or present continue to cause us to worry and wonder, listen to Jesus. “Peace be with you.” He paid for those sins. They are not counted against you. They have been removed as far as the east is from the west. Peace is trusting that God has declared you not guilty because Jesus rose from the dead.

And the disciples were given the honor of declaring the peace of forgiveness to others. Jesus gave them the authority to forgive those who repent and not forgive those who will not repent. Pastors are called by God through congregations to publicly use the authority of the keys to publicly and privately absolve sins in the name of our Triune God. Individual Christians are given the authority to forgive the sins of other believers in the name of Jesus too. You are the recipient of the peace of forgiveness, and you get to deliver this peace to others in your life. Think of the peace this kind of forgiveness can bring to families and friends and neighbors. Forgiveness replaces grudges. Peace replaces suspicion and anger.

Connected to the peace of forgiveness is the peace of eternal life. Those who have not seen and yet believe that Christ rose from the dead have life now and forever. Jesus’ resurrection therefore gives us peace when the doctors give us bad news. Jesus’ resurrection gives us peace when we suffer from the evil of this world, for the life to come will be one of perfect peace. When the news of the day brings worries to our hearts, Jesus’ resurrection gives us peace. There is nothing in this life that can take us away from the One who raised himself from the dead. And this same Jesus who died will take us to be with him where we will only hear good news of great joy as we gather with all believers around his throne.

God has written the best adventure story ever. Jesus is the hero who suffered, died and rose again to give all people a chance at peace with God now and peace forever in the home he prepared for those who believe. For God’s story of salvation is a true story. All human stories of returning home are imitations of the story of how Christ delivered peace for his people.

Amen.