

April 7, 2024

John 20:19-31

“Peace Be With You!”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Try to put yourselves into the shoes of the apostles for a moment. Today, in our gospel reading, we find them gathered together in an upper room on that first Easter evening trying to process the thought of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Consider all that they had gone through in the course of just one week - from the triumphal entry into Jerusalem to the crucifixion and the death of their Master. In between, Jesus had washed their feet and had shared the fulfillment of Passover with them. There was the anguish in the garden where they fell asleep as Jesus prayed. There was the betrayal of one of their own and their own failure when they fled from Jesus to save their own skins. Jesus was dead and buried and so it seemed for good. They were in hiding. But the word now comes that the tomb is empty. He is risen!

Life was truly turned upside down for these apostles. Perhaps the same can be said for your life in the last few weeks. Things haven't stopped since the resurrection of Jesus. Our lives continue to grind on after the celebration of Jesus and his empty tomb. Our glorious resurrection is still to come. There is still that darkness that will not stop doing its best to intrude into our lives. So many of us crushed by the everyday occurrences that don't make the news. And then there is all that weighs on our hearts. But it may be darkest at home because you are overwhelmed by sickness and sadness, broken health, and broken happiness. Death is still here despite the eternal life revealed at the cross and empty tomb.

Just imagine the swirl of emotions those disciples must have been feeling when Jesus came and stood among them that first Easter evening! No doubt they felt incredible joy. No doubt they wrestled with thoughts of sadness over so much that had happened. And there is much hardness of heart in Thomas who will not allow the sun to break and shine into his dark world. Can you imagine the guilt they must have felt for abandoning him? And yet we often abandon him when things are looking down. Nevertheless, Jesus miraculously enters that room and he simply says: **"Peace be with you."**

Do you know what those words **"Peace be with you,"** really mean? They are words of absolution. They are words of forgiveness. They are words of pardon. Jesus is already one step ahead of what the disciples are currently going through and he knows exactly what they need to hear. They need to know that everything is okay. They need to know that things are going to be alright. They need to know that all is well with Jesus and themselves. And this is what will cut through the bad times and the darkness that keeps on trying to make its way into their lives.

The gospel of John goes on to say: "When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord." I think that what catches my attention in this short verse is the observation that the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. For as much as what the apostles had gone through in the course of the week, there was a gladness when they saw the Lord. It made a difference in their lives. And it is supposed to make a difference in our own lives as well whenever we hear his voice in the word or see his death and resurrection in the washing of our baptisms. What a gift it is to know that Jesus truly loves us individually and collectively whenever we receive in the sacrament of the altar his very body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins. He gives himself to us in this life all the time. Too bad we do not always see it for what it is. May the Lord help our faith as he did with Thomas.

Much is said regarding our gospel lesson concerning the faithlessness of Thomas, but there is a lot to be said about the tremendous upheaval that the other disciples were experiencing and the relief that they found in simply knowing that their redeemer was alive. And that brings to mind the account of Job. Remember Job? He went through more suffering and darkness than any child of God I know. The Lord God had allowed Satan the accuser to unleash on him a whirlwind of pain that I have a hard time wrapping my head around. What was it that kept him sane? Job reveals to us exactly what it was that kept him strong when he says the following from the nineteenth chapter:

I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!

Before he speaks these words, Job says that they should be written down, inscribed in a book. Moreover, an iron pen should write them in lead. And, if this isn't enough, he says that these words should be engraved in the rock forever. If that's the case, and it is, then we should really pay attention to them. Before the incarnation, sufferings and death on the cross, and resurrection of the Redeemer, Job speaks of these things as if they are already done for him. Thus, in the midst of all his trouble he clings to the resurrection for his joy. He is able to somehow find gladness in the midst of all that makes him unhappy in this life. That says a lot to me and I hope it does to you.

Jesus is in the room of our life by faith. I know that this isn't exactly how we want it be right now since we would prefer faith to be fulfilled. We want to be with Jesus and fully happy without any intrusion of sadness. But, perhaps we should consider our alternatives. We can spend our whole lives concentrating on the sadness of sin and death, or we can spend our whole lives considering the peace of forgiveness and eternal life. We can moan and groan about everything, or we can see our good God in everything. I certainly know that we can't help but to go back and forth on the matter. But I can certainly say that the more we are in the room with Jesus, in the means of grace, the more likely we become the type of people who see a glass half full.

I am guessing that you have heard the expression before. If not, some people who look at a glass that is filled half way with water see either a glass half empty or a glass half full. The half empty people are assumed to be sad people because the water is almost gone. The half full people are assumed to be happy because they see that there is water in the glass. We have every reason to be happy because in Jesus we always have a glass that never runs out of the drink we need. It feels half empty because we currently live by faith, and "faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." Thus, faith is easily attacked. But we have Jesus in our room, and that should cheer us and lighten our troubles.

Jesus comes to us in the midst of our sadness and fears and sin and guilt, to offer each and every one of us that simple word of grace, and mercy, and forgiveness that we need to hear over and again: "**Peace be with you!**" I love you and your mine. I am with you always. What is about to be in heaven will take away all sadness. Be strong and patient. You must remain here for a little while because you have work to do that is extraordinary. And that brings us to the next part of our text for today.

Jesus said to them again, “**Peace be with you.** As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.” He speaks peace to them twice because they needed to hear it repeatedly - and we do to. He breathes new life into them. Jesus has done the same for us in the message of Scripture. The Bible is the very breath of God by which we are connected to Jesus and receive eternal life and the resurrection of our bodies. It is truly a breath of fresh air that we need every day of our lives.

And the commission that Jesus gave to the apostles is in part the same commission that he gives to his church and pastors. The greatest gift that has ever been given as been given to us so that we may give it to others. Great power has been entrusted to us as Christians to be exercised privately and publicly. It is a power that is greater than raising Lazarus from the dead. It is the power to give the forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and all the gifts of heaven. The fullness of the gospel treasures that Jesus earned for us on the cross, and ratified at the empty tomb, are now ours and to be given to others. We give peace.

Jesus continues to make his appearance in this world through us. The peace of our resurrected Lord, that somehow is able to cut through all our sorrows in this life, is ours to give to others. What does it say of the women who saw the empty tomb and heard the angel in Matthew 28:8-10? “So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. And behold, Jesus met them and said, ‘Greetings!’ And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.’” Did you catch those words? The women had “fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.” They had holy fear (not terror) and they had great pleasure and happiness. It’s no wonder that they wanted to spread the good news! And we do too! And what’s the good news? “Do not be afraid!” Just another way of saying: “**Peace Be With You!**”

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott