

Second Sunday of Easter; April 16, 2023
+ John 20:19-31 +
"From the Living Jesus Comes Peace"

On the evening of that first day of the week, the disciples were together in behind locked doors because of their fear of the Jews. Jesus came, stood among them, and said to them, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. So the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you! Just as the Father has sent me, I am also sending you." After saying this, he breathed on them on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whenever you forgive people's sins, they are forgiven. Whenever you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

But Thomas, one of the Twelve, the one called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. 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."

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. 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."

Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"

Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

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

Fear is a crazy thing, isn't it? Fear will keep you off hiking trails because you're afraid of snakes or bears, and out of the Washington Monument because you're afraid of heights, and out of the public eye because you're afraid of public speaking. FOMO—the fear of missing out on things —locks people into their phones. Young people fear what their peers think, how the test will turn out, and what the future will hold. Parents fear their children getting harmed and will shell out endless time, effort, and money to protect. The fear of aging and death leads to billions spent on prescriptions and pills, doctors and dosages, and a host of custom cosmetics, creams, and cures.

But what are we *really* afraid of? Isn't the fear of the unknown one of the biggest fears? The fear of the unknown leads us to all kinds of anxious worst-case-scenarios and catastrophizing. What if there are bears on the trail? What if I run into one? What if it eats me? . . . What if I can't beat this cancer? How much will I suffer? What will happen to my family? ... What if I lose my job? What if we lose our house? What if I can't give my kids a successful future? . . . So many fears of the unknown!

Oh, how fear seizes our hearts! To be sure, in a broken and sinful world filled with sinful people, there is plenty that could cause fear. But oh, how scary moments expose my own sinful heart! Those anxious

moments press the pressure button and Satan licks his chops to have a field day. He whispers thoughts of doubt and despair and hopelessness and guilt, and we bite into those lies faster than Adam and Eve bit the fruit in the Garden.

So, may I suggest to you that there is something else going on here? If you really dig deep down inside, lurking behind all these very real fears is something far worse. The core root of every worldly fear is this: the fear that my relationship with God is broken.

Think about this. If I'm afraid of the future, am I not really afraid that God won't guide and lead and be with me as promised? If I'm afraid of cancer, am I not really afraid that God won't give me the strength, won't take care of my family if I die, won't bring me to the cancer-free halls of heaven? If I'm afraid of my own guilt and shame from all my sin, am I not really afraid that God won't still love me, that his forgiveness has limits, that somehow, I won't meet the entry requirements of heaven? If I truly trusted in God with perfect trust like we see in Jesus' earthly life, what would I ever have to be afraid of? You see, every single thing every single person is afraid of can be traced back to this point—my life is broken from sin, my relationship with God is broken, and that makes me truly afraid.

Case in point in the Gospel today: There we see the disciples, another group locked in a room. And what does John, who was there, tell us? They were there, **behind locked doors because of their fear of the Jews**. Now mind you, if you're tracking the timeline, Jesus had been teaching them for months that this would all happen, the women had already seen the empty tomb and told the disciples he rose just as he said, Peter and John had already run to the tomb and seen it empty, and Jesus personally had appeared to Mary Magdalene and she told the disciples. Everything just as Jesus had said and even confirmed by angels at the tomb and a sighting of the risen Jesus. Yet what do we see here? Disciples locked behind closed doors in fear.

Imagine all the unknown fears running through their minds. "What if we are next? What if they kill us too? What if this is a hoax? What if the women are lying? What if they were just seeing things? What if Jesus is gone? What if we have no purpose or plan for the future?"

But don't you think they had deeper fears? "If Jesus is alive, what will he say to us? I denied knowing him, what if he denies knowing me!? We abandoned him, what if he abandons us? What if he doesn't love us anymore? What if we're all on our own now? What if . . .?"

Then just like that—Jesus is there, standing among them and all their fear. So, what would Jesus do? What would Jesus say? "You morons, how could you! . . . Why would you abandon me? . . . Why didn't you believe me? ... How could you be so sinful?" No. Not at all. **Jesus came, stood among them, and said to them, "Peace be with you!"** Oh, what a word! *Peace*.

Peace was such an important word to the Israelites. You can find it all over the Old Testament. It was so important that they even greeted each other with it, *Shalom Aleichem*, "Peace be with you." To those Hebrew ears of Jesus' disciples, peace means more than lack of conflict. Peace is when you are in a state of blessing and flourishing. In particular, peace is when you are in a state of blessed flourishing because you have a good relationship with God. God's people longed for this peace as they heard prophecies about

peace and the Prince of Peace and a time when they would have peace.

So, recalling that joyous Christmas day when the angels announced to the shepherds, “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace,” here stands Jesus, living and breathing, and proclaiming that it finally and fully happened. What the angels announced—peace. There’s now peace. Not once, but twice, and then a third time for the sake of doubting Thomas, Jesus declared, **“Peace be with you!”**

And before Satan could even start with the whole doubt thing and more fears, Jesus gave them proof of this peace. **After he had said this, he showed them his hands and side. So the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.** And the following week: **“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.”**

There is all the proof we need. Sinners surely do have every right to be afraid of our broken relationship with God— except! —the Savior went to the cross to suffer the most terrifying and dreadful thing for us: the hell of being abandoned by God. Look at the proof. Holes in hands, feet, and side from a perfect Savior who died for our doubts, who washes away our worries, who forgives our fears. We see the wounds of a Savior who paid the wages of sin, which is death, and alleviated God’s wrath. Yet we see these wounds in a risen Savior who is alive and victorious, triumphant over sin, death, and hell. The Prince of Peace had won peace. The cross and empty tomb prove it. And so, the Prince of Peace freely gives the gift he won as he says, **“Peace be with you!”**

But don’t think that crushed serpent Satan is going to give up. With his dying breaths he’s going to whisper more doubts and fears into your ears. Jesus tells us today how blessed we are who have not seen like Thomas and yet have believed. But you and I both know, that’s tough! Not seeing Jesus standing in front of us, not touching his hands and feet and side—that’s tough! And Satan knows that.

So, he plagues us with all these doubts as he sees to place fear in our hearts, ultimately questioning our relationship with God. And we still stumble and fall as we struggle with our sinful hearts. We have this peace from Jesus, but the struggle is real to remain in that Easter joy. But we know what to do and where to go—back to the Prince of Peace.

So, in a few moments we will humbly sing, “Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us. Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world grant us your *peace*.”

But then suddenly in those humble moments of begging for peace, Jesus appears! In another Easter miracle, the risen Lord appears and says “Here, touch me. Not my hands and side. Touch my body and blood. Touch the proof of your victory.” So, we taste and see that the Lord is good and we exclaim with Thomas, **“My Lord and my God!”** And the pastor then assures you, “Your sins are forgiven, depart in *peace*.”

Like the disciples in that Easter evening room, this fills us with joy and wonder. We have to ponder this. We pray about this. We sing about this. But then the pastor does something that God’s people have specifically designed for thousands of years. He gives one last word for you to walk out the door with.

What's the last thing the Church has designed for you to hear from God? "The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you, the Lord look on you with favor and give you *peace*."

So, we leave God's house and our little Easter meal with Jesus. And we leave with what the apostle Paul calls a peace that surpasses—that transcends—all understanding.

You see, it's not that we leave here knowing the war in Ukraine will be over soon. It might, but then there will be other wars. It's not that we leave here knowing there will never be another pandemic, or every cancer cell is permanently gone, or no job will ever be lost, or home foreclosed, or any other worldly problem.

Oh no. We know and expect these things in a sinful world with sinful people. But rather, we walk out these doors knowing that Jesus has repaired our relationship with God. We're redeemed and restored to being his dear child. That means when there is war, cancer, job loss, anxiety, problem, or pain, we know that God will be with us. We know that God will work it for our good. We know that we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. And best of all, we know all the while he's guiding us home where we will never hunger or thirst and he will wipe every tear from our eyes.

This is what Jesus has done. This is what Jesus has won. ***Peace be with you.*** Amen.