

Christ is risen! (He is risen indeed! Alleluia!) These words are the foundation of our faith, as St. Paul said, **“if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins” (1 Corinthians 15:17).**

After his resurrection, Jesus equipped the disciples with what they needed to live their lives without fear, without shame, and in peace. This morning we’re going to talk about what this means for our walk with God and with one another.

OPENING PRAYER

JOHN 20:19-31

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, **“Peace be with you.”**²⁰ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.²¹ Jesus said to them again, **“Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.”**²² And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, **“Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld.”**²⁴ Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came.²⁵ So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.”²⁶ Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.”²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. **Do not disbelieve, but believe.**”²⁸ Thomas answered him, **“My Lord and my God!”**²⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? **Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.**”³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book;³¹ **but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.**

The first Easter began with sorrow: the women among the disciples visited the tomb of Christ with their heads hung low, weeping, reflecting on how things could've been, if only.... But the sorrow didn't last long. It was overtaken by frustration, for their Lord's body was not to be found! And then fear overtook their frustration as they met the angels who sat in front of the tomb! But then Mary Magdalene's heart erupted with joy as she encountered her Lord face-to-face, crying out, "**Rabboni!**"

But no one else believed, at least at first. But the Lord always meets us where we live.

We read, John 20:19, On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "PEACE be with you."

The "**first day of the week**" was Sunday. It was still Easter, the day of the Resurrection. "**(T)he doors being locked**" means they were hiding. These guys were terrified that they might end up like Jesus! Which is understandable. Fear is the correct response to danger.

But it's interesting that the disciples were so fearful after spending over 3-years following Jesus around, clinging to all of his promises, and themselves being entrusted with supernatural power to heal people of their diseases.

But the Lord met them where they lived. We read, "**(He) came and stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you.'**"

"**Peace**" in the New Testament is the same as "shalom" in the Old Testament. They both mean "completeness, soundness, a sense of safety and welfare, tranquility, and contentment." This kind of peace is about what's going on in here (in our hearts), between us and God.

In the Gospel we read, **John 20:20-22, He showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, "PEACE be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am SENDING you." ²² And when he had said this, he BREATHED on them and said to them, "Receive the HOLY SPIRIT."**

That “**the disciples were glad**” means that they “rejoiced,” that they were “overjoyed.” This was a “wow!” experience for them!

And then he gave them marching orders. He said, “**As the Father has sent me, even so I am SENDING you.**” That the sending follows the peace-giving is of great importance. For if there is no peace, there is no message. If the disciples could not give testimony to unbelievers that their relationship with the Lord was secure and that they found peace in it, if instead they lived with the same kind of uncertainty and fear as everyone else, then what made them any different from the pagans? Nothing at all.

It’s important to understand that being “**sent**” was not the only thing the disciples needed, however. We often think that giving someone an opportunity is enough. A new opportunity can be inspiring, but one needs the will to accept it.

So Jesus gave the disciples a gift in their hearts. We read that “**he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’**”

This is the Lord taking responsibility for providing for his people everything they need. We cannot lift ourselves up by our boot straps and generate faith. If anyone could’ve, it would’ve been the disciples. They wanted to believe, but they couldn’t despite their friendship and love for Jesus.

But the Spirit of God rested on them, dwelt in them, and they were transformed. We read, **John 20:23, “If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld.”**

This was how the mission played out: The disciples had been forgiven because Jesus died for them. They believed this and they were filled with peace. This peace was a sign of the life of Christ which now dwelt within them. And they had something to share with an unbelieving and troubled world, planting seeds of life eternal through the forgiveness of sins just as Jesus had done for them.

Everyone who believes may do the same as the 12 disciples in their home, in their work and school—wherever they find themselves. We can and we should forgive

others for their sins. For this is the gift which flows from persons endowed with this life, Christ's life, this life built on the foundation of the Cross.

We read, **John 20:24-25, Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."**

Thomas doubted, but his doubts were only a symptom, a symptom of fear, that fear that something is too good to be true, that this whole thing is going to be a wild goose-chase, a colossal waste of time, and that it will result in another misstep with the authorities. But because Jesus loved Thomas as much as everyone else, he came to him in that special place where he knew he lived.

We read, **John 20:26-29, Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "PEACE be with you." ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." ²⁸ Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."**

"**Eight days**" from Easter Sunday would've been the following Sunday. That's how the Jews counted, that is, they counted the first day as in, "Sunday, Monday.... Sunday." That's eight days.

Again, Jesus came to the disciples through locked doors and greeted them, "**Peace be with you.**" A better, though, granted, more awkward translation is, "**Peace to you.**" This was not a wish but a statement of fact, which means the peace was already present among the disciples in their Lord Jesus, who stood before them with outstretched arms, and Thomas exclaimed, "**My Lord and my God!**"

That's when Thomas found his peace. He had been saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who takes away the sins of the world.

Jesus said to Thomas, "**Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.**" He said this so the disciples would be encouraged to take the message of his defeat of sin, death, and the devil to the world, a world that would not see Jesus but would benefit from the work he accomplished on the Cross.

We read, **John 20:30-31, Now Jesus did many other SIGNS in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book;³¹ but these are written so that you may BELIEVE that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by BELIEVING you may have LIFE in his NAME.**

St. John writes that Christ did "**many other signs,**" which he's kept to himself. But he's intentionally written about the signs which are important to illustrate Christ's message that we might believe and "**have life in his name.**"

Brothers and sisters in Christ, where do you live? Are you so consumed with responsibilities that you have lost track of what it means to believe that the Lord can help you? "**Peace be with you.**"

Or maybe you're overwhelmed by fear—loss of job or a relationship, a bad grade in school or being passed over for a promotion. Perhaps these things overshadow the Light that streams down from the Cross, and they steal away your joy? "**Peace be with you.**"

Or perhaps you're filled with sadness, an inexplicable sense of dread and sorrow such that you cannot hardly believe that God's love is real. "**Peace be with you.**"

Friends, you are forgiven. Your life is filled with the life of Jesus because of your Baptism and your faith. So what troubles you? Release everything unto his care; relinquish everything to him. For he wants to meet you where you live. "**Peace be with you.**"

The peace, the shalom of Jesus already lies in your heart. All you have to do now is find it and hold on to it. For myself when I am lonely and frustrated, hassled and annoyed, I meditate on the Lord's Prayer, especially the first petition, "**Our Father who art in heaven.**" God is in heaven, but he's also my father, and he cares for me. He loves me and he is with me wherever I go.

Or I'll sing a verse which lifts me up: "Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in his wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace." This lifts up my heart.

Or I'll recite to myself a piece of Scripture which I've found encouraging: Jesus said, "Come to me all ye who are weak and heavy laden and I will give you rest." I find peace in these words.

Friends in Christ, this week may you know this peace, the peace of God which passes all understanding in your heart, that peace that overcomes the heartaches of this world in which we live.

This week may you be filled with courage and confidence in your day to day walk with God, for the Lord has breathed his life into your life, and he loves you so very much.

And this week may you have the opportunity to share this Good News with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.