**John 20:19-31** Easter 2

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** April 24, 2022

*John 20:19On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” 20After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. 21Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” 22And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. 23If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”*

*24Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. 25So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.”*

*26 A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” 27Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.” 28Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!” 29Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”*

**Easter Means Peace**

Dear Friends in Christ,

Easter eggs. Oh the fun of being a kid!

So what’s the biggest Easter egg prize out there? Well, doing a quick online search—and it was admittedly rather quick—I didn’t find anything too surprising, which, in itself, was kind of surprising! We tend to overdo things. I expected to find an Easter egg hunt giving away a Rolex watch or a Lincoln Escalade. No. One place was putting a certificate for an iPad in one of its Easter eggs. Several were giving gift certificates to restaurants. But contrary to my expectations, I didn’t see anything outrageous. And that’s a good thing! It’s like the vast majority of Easter egg hunt organizers realize that Easter’s about something more important than the candy or prizes.

Which is exactly what the Women of Faith planned into last week’s Easter egg hunt. They didn’t have an egg hunt just to have an egg hunt. And they certainly didn’t want to confuse kids about Easter, as if to say, “You are probably too young to understand this Easter thing, so we’ll give you candy instead.” Not at all. Their intention was to use the egg hunt as a springboard for the even bigger and better truths about Easter. That’s why the egg hunt was just 30 minutes before the worship service.

Well, if we’re not supposed to walk away from Easter with candy and chocolate, what *do* we walk away with?

The Gospel of John, more than any of the other three, would communicate what Easter means to people living after Easter. John doesn’t leave it up to us to draw our own conclusions, or to walk away from the tomb wondering what happened, or if we know the facts of what happened, he doesn’t want us walking away with just facts. John’s Gospel shows how Jesus’ rising from the dead changes the lives permanently of those who know him.

Today we especially look at the effects of Easter reflected in verses 19-29. In those first eleven verses, Jesus uses the same phrase three times. Three times Jesus says, ***“Peace be with you.”***

So you think, “Well, Jesus says the ‘Peace be with you’ thing three times. I guess Jesus wants me to have peace.” Yes, but that is so superficial. Let’s explore how each time Jesus says ***“Peace”*** he is addressing something different. Jesus, in saying it three times, is telling us that he desires that we have peace in the three key spheres of our life.

**I.** Here’s the first one in verses nineteen and twenty. ***“On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you!’ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.”*** (19-20)

First, Jesus speaks peace to his followers’ fears. They were afraid of reprisals. They had seen what happened to Jesus on the cross a couple days earlier and they were afraid!

Now if you are like me, you are probably thinking that these guys are cowardly scaredy-cats, always imaging the worst that could possibly happen. That’s because you live in 21st century America where, even in our polarized society, we still enjoy relative peace and rule of law. We know nothing of the culture of violence of the ancient world. In 30AD, the time of this reading, there were people who in their youth could have talked to eye witnesses of a dreadful event in Jerusalem. In 88BC, one faction of the Jewish religious establishment crucified 800 of their religious opponents in a single day. That happened in 88BC. They weren’t criminals. It wasn’t Roman versus Jew. It was politics among the Jews of that day. That the Eleven had the doors locked for fear of reprisal was by no means far-fetched, nor, for that matter, terribly effective. (*For reference, search “Alexander Jannaeus.”*)

Jesus stepped into that climate of fear in that room and told them, ***“Peace be with you.”*** He bid their anxious fears to cease. It wasn’t that they would escape all harm. One of those Eleven, James, would be executed right there in Jerusalem in a few short years. But Jesus was assuring them of God’s knowledge of their situation. He was telling them that God’s plans were bigger than their worries. God’s hand was guiding all things, even the evil things. ***“Peace be with you.”***

So Jesus, the Conqueror of Death and Giver of Life, in the midst of your fear, or despair, or sorrow would come to you, his child, and bid you peace. When you hear God’s promises read from the Bible, or spoken by a Christian friend, or sung in a beloved hymn, may you, like those disciples hear Jesus telling you ***“Peace be with you.”***

**II.** The second time Jesus says ***“Peace be with you,”*** Jesus is not repeating himself. Well, literally, he is. But when you pay attention, he’s not. No longer is Jesus addressing the worries and anxieties the outside world imposes upon us. Now he addresses something else. He addresses our aspirations and purpose in life. ***“‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.’ And with that he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven’”*** (21-23).

Jesus addresses our purpose in this world. For these Eleven, this sending out and pronouncing of forgiveness was of the highest order. Most Christians are not given that full-time public role. Yet it is true of each of you in your individual lives. Even as you parent children, as you work with other people, as you live alongside neighbors, doing the dishes, earning a living, mowing the lawn, you have the gift of the Holy Spirit. Simply living like God-fearing people is a testimony! But you do more than that. How often I hear of you sharing with children and grandchildren the truths of their Savior! How often you invite people to an Easter service, a Christmas service! God knows better than I! How often in our weekly 20 seconds of silent prayer in our Sunday service, how often you pray that others, often very specific people in your life, might hear and listen to the Gospel and one day confess Christ as Lord! This second ***“Peace”*** from Jesus lips fills our life with purpose, both in the kingdom-of-heaven work and the this-world work we do. ***“Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you!”*** We are not called to serve in the rat-race ways of this world, but in God’s life-giving ways.

**III.** The third ***“Peace”*** Jesus speaks is a word of peace to the sinner. ***“A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you!’*** ***Then he said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe’”*** (25-27).

Thomas had been wrong. He had sinned against Jesus by his disbelief. He had also sinned against Jesus’ people. They had told him what they had seen and heard, but Thomas would have none of it. Just a couple days ago I saw someone walking the street wearing a t-shirt that proclaimed, “I do what I want to do!” No. We don’t. We do not get to do what *we* want to do, think what *we* want to think, and believe what *we* want to believe. Often God’s people speak to us, direct us, even confront us, and we *still* insist on our own ways. Remember that when we disregard God’s people, we disregard God. What parent is not upset when their child is disrespected. Do you think God feels any differently about his own faithful children who are disrespected by other Christians?

Yet… yet, Jesus comes and tells all the rest and Thomas, ***“Peace be with you.”*** I always need to remember that for two reasons.

1) When I have sinned, and my sin becomes obvious to me—just as Thomas’ sin became embarrassingly obvious to him when Jesus repeated Thomas’ exact words about putting his fingers and hands on his wounds (“Oh no, Jesus heard that!”)—when my sin becomes that obvious to me, I would hide my face from all who know me, and fear to approach my holy God. Then Jesus says, ***“Peace be with you.”***

2) And the second reason I need to remember Jesus’ ***“Peace”*** to Thomas is that sometimes I speak with Christians who have wandered. If my Savior, the one against whom they have sinned, tells the repentant ***“Peace,”*** then I have no right but to say to them, ***“Peace.”*** Mistaken Christians are still Christians. May I ever approach all who see the error of their ways with the grace of Jesus who spoke to Thomas, ***“Peace be with you.”***

So, we walk away from Easter with the joy of eternal life, but also peace in this life. Do you remember the three peaces Jesus gave? Peace to calm the fears and pressures of this world as when Jesus stepped into that room; peace that reminds me I have a God-given and God-pleasing purpose in this world as he told his disciples he was sending them out into the real world; and finally the peace of forgiveness as he announced to Thomas, the between Jesus and me, and me and you brothers and sisters in Christ. Amen.