

Christ is risen! (He is risen indeed! Alleluia!) These words are the foundation of our faith. For 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 walk with him in faith fearlessly, 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

READ 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! Their emotions were jacked up. Fear overtook their

frustration as they met angels who sat on the stone before the tomb! And then there was peace. Mary Magdalene's heart erupted with joy as she encountered her Lord face-to-face, crying out, "**Rabboni!**"

But no one else believed. But the Lord always meets us where we live, revealing Himself and leading us according to His wisdom.

So it was for the disciples. Here's how it happened. 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 was understandable. Fear is the correct response to danger. For instance, a healthy fear of red hot stove burners, electrical outlets, and dark alleys is a good thing.

However, I do think it's interesting the disciples were filled with so much fear despite their Lord's promises. For over 3-years they'd followed Him around, clinging to His every word, and themselves being entrusted with the power to heal people as a testimony to their Lord's ministry. But they were afraid, nonetheless.

So the Lord met them where they lived. **"(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 being you and me and God.

For example, Jesus said to His disciples before the Crucifixion, **John 14:27, "PEACE I leave with you; my PEACE I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."**

Jesus was communicating a peace that's deep and personal, something that he possessed which he wanted to give to those who followed him. This peace is greater than all the

stuff the world gives us, such as money, power, and material things. Indeed, the Lord wants to replace the world's petty imitations of peace with His peace, true peace.

Before his crucifixion, Jesus testified, **John 16:33, "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have PEACE. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."**

When Jesus said that he had **"overcome the world,"** He was NOT saying that He had rid us of the struggles of the world because we belong to him. Rather, he was saying that because we belong to him, the struggles we confront day-by-day shall not take away our peace. He was saying that because we belong to him we have peace, for his life is our life in its fullness.

We read, **John 20:20-22, 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."**

We read that **"the disciples were glad."** **"(G)lad"** would be better translated as "rejoiced" or "overjoyed," for this was a "Wow!" experience for them!

And he said it again: **"Peace be with you."** But with these words he also 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 it is only an open door. To make the point, how many of us have let doors of opportunity swing wide open only to walk right by them?

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 children 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 all their time with Jesus and their love for him.

But the Spirit of God rested on them, dwelt in them, and they knew. They finally knew in their hearts that Christ's resurrected life was their gateway into eternity. That's how the disciples were finally empowered to carry forth their mission as Christ's disciples and spread the Good News.

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 which 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 forgiven 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."**

Even though he was "**one of the Twelve,**" Thomas doubted. But his doubts were only a symptom, a symptom of fear, 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. He made this declaration, and then he permitted Thomas to touch Him. Thomas put his hand in the wounds of the glorified body of the Lord, and he exclaimed, **"My Lord and my God!"**

Therein 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 believe and be saved.

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.**

The key here is NOT the "other signs," for in themselves signs easily become the objects of idolatry. That is, a miracle can become an end in itself. But signs should only be a witness to the message, that is, the message of the forgiveness of sins.

Indeed, the message is the heart of the ministry of bringing life to a dying world. For if there is no message, there can be no understanding, and if there is no understanding, there can be no faith, and if there is no faith there can be no salvation, and the work of Jesus on the Cross lies fruitless.

So, brothers and sisters, 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 with the things you fear—loss of job or a relationship, a bad grade 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. **“Peace be with you.”**

Jesus’ life belongs to you. Call on Him. Take faith in his testimony that He loves you, and He wants to meet you where you live. **“Peace be with you.”**

Friends in Christ, this week may you know 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 in your day to day life, for the Lord has breathed his life into your life. 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.