

SERMON FOR SUN. APRIL 24, 2022

Easter 2C 2022 John 20:19-31 “Peace be with you.”

Dear fellow redeemed of our Risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, that first Easter night the disciples were in turmoil. They were scared and confused. They didn't know what to do or what to think, so fear had effectively paralyzed them.

The women had seen the empty tomb. So had Peter and John. *Perhaps* it was true. Perhaps Jesus had risen from the dead. But if He had, where was He?

The Jews – *they* were still out there! Confident and emboldened by their victory over Jesus, once the Passover Festival was over, surely, they would be coming after them next!

And so the disciples had no peace. Even behind locked doors, they had no peace. Every time they heard a voice, the march of feet or horses' hooves they probably thought the worst. Fear fed upon fear, and the longer it went, the worse it got.

But it wasn't just things *outside themselves* that had stolen the disciples' peace; they were also trying to hide *from themselves*.

They had let their Lord down. When the going got tough, they got going, abandoning Jesus right when He needed them. They had pledged themselves to die with Jesus if it came down to it, but they were unable to follow through.

Their consciences would give them no rest or peace but weighed heavily on them; accusing and condemning them.

And we know how they felt. For who among us has not felt their fear and remorse? There is so much in this world, outside of us, that robs us of peace—criminals that we can see; diseases that we cannot see, accidents that seem so random.

Long gone are the days when we could leave our doors unlocked at night. But as the apostles found out, even locking our doors does not give us the peace that we seek.

Like the disciples, we, too, find a battle for peace within ourselves. We, too, have betrayed our Lord. We, too, are too ashamed to be too closely associated with Jesus.

We, too, have pledged ourselves to Him but often fail to follow through. We sin and continue in sin, and ***even like*** some of our sins. Our

sin, our conscience, our weakness, weigh heavy on us, ***robbing us of our peace.***

If only we could hide from it all. Then we would have peace, right?

Well, actually, no. Because despite what we may think, it is not anything outside or inside of us that has robbed us of our peace.

I have seen people at peace who are dying from final stage cancer. I have seen people at peace after horrible accidents.

No, peace is not taken from us by troubles, nor is it given to us by the absence of problems. What robs us of our peace is, in fact, **unbelief**. It is a lack of faith.

It is the unspoken assumption that these things happening around us and in us ***are more powerful than God.***

It's the irrational fear that God cannot or will not protect us from them, deliver us from them, or *use* them for His good.

It is the delusion that it is just us against them and we are so little, and weak while they are so big and strong.

Therefore, without faith and trust, we are just like the disciples: we worry, we have anxiety, and we fear. Fear that cripples and threatens to consume us.

But then, Jesus comes. In our text, Jesus comes to His frightened, cowering disciples. He comes, not as a spirit, but in His body. His resurrected body. And He gives to them what they so desperately need and says: ***“Peace be with you.”***

And, as always, God's Word is performative; it does what it says. The disciples are at peace because with His Word and His presence, ***their faith was restored.***

Did they fear the Jews? Did they fear death? These need not be feared – see, Jesus has conquered them!

And did they fear their sins? Did they fear that Jesus would condemn them? These need not be feared either – for Jesus does not hold their failures against them. They are forgiven.

Jesus makes no mention of their sins or doubts, shortcomings, or fear. He brings only peace. And they have peace, for they now know that there is nothing to fear. They are not alone. They are not on their own. ***They believe.***

But there is one who is still in turmoil. Thomas is still confused and scared.

And so his brother apostles, now filled with faith, go searching for him. And when they find him, they tell him the good news, but he cannot believe it. His fear, despair, and doubt, are too much for him.

And so, eight days later Jesus met his disciples again. They are again behind those locked doors – this time not for fear of the Jews, **but for Thomas' sake.**

This was Jesus' "second coming," if you will. Once again, He does not condemn. He gives peace. He offers His body as living proof to Thomas. And because of His Word and His presence, **Thomas' faith is restored. He believes and confesses that Jesus is "My Lord and my God."**

And for the same reason, Jesus comes to us today. To you and I, who worry, wonder, and doubt.

Jesus comes to us with His Word and His presence. His Word, which does what it says, and His presence – His real body and blood – to give us what we so desperately need: peace.

Although we do not see and feel the wounds of Christ, as Thomas did, He is here for us, offering His body to us.

And while we may not be able to put our fingers into the holes in Jesus' hands and feet, or our hand into His side we do have His body and blood put on our tongues.

The same body and blood that Thomas touched. The same body and blood that hung on the cross and laid in the grave. The same body and blood, here, to give us peace.

And this is what we confess in our liturgy. Just before you come forward to receive His body and blood, you hear of this peace: I say, **"The peace of the Lord be with you always."** Then you sing, **"Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; grant us peace."**

And then again, right after you receive this body and blood, you hear: **"Depart in peace."**

And then there are the final words of the liturgy, the Benediction: ***The Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace.*** And you reply: **"Amen."**

And with that word, you are confessing, Yes, this is true. Yes, I'm forgiven. Yes, I have peace, for if God is for me, who can be against me? Therefore, I have nothing to fear.

Oh yes, thank you, Jesus, my Lord, and my God. Thank you, my Savior, for being here with me, in me and for me, just as you were for the disciples and for Thomas.

Our Savior, who our reading from Revelation states is **the one who is and who was and who is to come—the Alpha and the Omega, the one who died and behold, is live evermore *is with me.***

If “**the one who holds the keys of death and hell** is for me, what could I possibly have to fear? From what can He not deliver me? What will He not do for me?

And so, like the disciples, and like Thomas, our faith is restored. We believe and confess with Thomas that Jesus is “**My Lord and my God.**”

Now that doesn't mean that bad things won't happen to us— they will. But it does mean that you can have peace even in the face of calamity. For your Savior has conquered all your enemies.

There is nothing in all of creation that can separate you from the love of your Savior.

He is here for you – in His body and blood – to give you peace, faith, hope, and confidence.

Just as the disciples once hid behind locked doors, but later openly confessed Jesus Christ as Lord, we too can openly defy the God-hating culture by saying, “**We must obey God rather than men.**”

We can do so because we have the peace of God that transcends all understanding. Even under arrest, even faced with persecution, we have peace.

For our faith is not in myself, but in the One who has overcome whatever the world can throw at me. We know that come what may, we already have victory in Christ.

Because He is Risen! We have peace, and we're victorious just as He was. So, fear not, my fellow redeemed, because Jesus is here for us just as he was that first Easter evening, and He comes to assure us that God's love rests on us. AMEN