

SERMON FOR APRIL 19, 2020

Easter 2A 2020 John 20:19-31 Forgiveness won and given. LSB 490

Grace, mercy, and **peace** to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. Christ is risen!

Brothers and sisters, I regret to inform you that Easter is not enough. Yes, that's right. You didn't mishear, nor did I misspeak.

Easter is not enough. Why? Because forgiveness won must also be forgiveness given. The peace with God which Jesus won on Calvary must be a peace proclaimed. If not, the disciples would probably *still* be locked in that upper room!

Imagine, if you will, the disciples those 2 nights, hunkering down behind closed doors. The fear was palpable, their hearts must've been pounding in their chests. Their hands were sweating. Every noise they heard . . . *what was that?*

And every time they closed their eyes in sleep they were tortured by the wouldas, couldas, and shouldas, as each considered their role in the catastrophe that was Good Friday.

All their hopes had been set on Jesus, now they were hopeless. They'd seen Jesus help so many, and now they sat there helpless. In essence, they were captives.

The upper room was their coffin, the doors nailed shut with the hammer of fear. But then into their coffin steps the Lord of life.

The resurrected Jesus miraculously appears to them, walking through the walls.

And while His presence gave them joy, it was His words that set them free.

Peace be with you.

For with those words, they knew Jesus did not hold their sin and failure against them. They knew He did not hold their fear and doubt against them.

He did not chastise them for being there behind locked doors. He forgave them, and let their fingers read— God's love for them, carved on His hands and side. And with that they are raised to life again!

For just as death and the tomb could not keep Jesus in, so our Lord would not let the deathly coffin of fear and death keep His disciples in.

After all, this is why He came into the world in the first place. To set us free from fear and death is why He died and rose again. This is why He lives. To set us free. To give us joy and life again.

For you see, it is not just first century disciples that lock themselves into upper rooms, for fear of the Jews.

What is it with your life? What do you fear? What self-constructed coffins of fear or sin are you in? What wouldas, couldas, and shouldas haunt your mind? What are you running away from?

Oh, maybe you do not live in fear every day.

Perhaps you have mastered the art of hiding your guilt, your hurt, or your fear, putting on a happy face for the world.

But while you may be able to fool ***all of the people some of the time*** . . . it's still there. Your pain, your loss, your doubts, still hurt. And it still worries. And it still drags

you down.

Whatever "It" is, it is a coffin robbing you of your life and joy. Your own little upper room with locked doors and enormous fears.

And so, the One who came for His disciples **then** is the One who comes *for you today*.

Jesus doesn't wait for you to open up your bunkered down, barred up heart and invite Him in, not that you would or even could if given the chance, Jesus comes to give you what you need; to set you free that His **peace be with you**.

With you, yes even little old you. **PAUSE**

In the face of a pandemic, much has changed, but one thing hasn't. To all of you listening today or reading these words, I declare to you in Jesus' Name, "**Peace be to you.**"

All is well with our souls, because as the old hymn says, **Jesus Lives! The Victory's Won!**

Your Lord is not here **to accuse**, but **to forgive**.

Not to **demand**, but **to provide**.

Not to bring **you down**, but to raise **you up**.

For in Christ, the wages of sin have been paid, the fires of hell quenched, Satan's accusing lips shut, and the prison house of sin and death opened, once and for all.

Today, He shows you His wounds and instead of saying, **Look what you did to me!** He says, **Look what I have done for you**. In Him you live not in regret and fear, but in joy and peace.

That is the joy and peace that caused Peter – who was in the coffin of the upper room that night – to write:

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

Yes, raised is what they were! Born again from a coffin of fear and death to a new life of faith, which no one could take away from them.

Not the Jews, or the Romans. Not Satan, Not **Anyone or anything**. For it is "**an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, [being] kept in heaven . . .**"

So that while there is still struggling and suffering in this world, the sin in the world and the sin in us cannot defeat us.

For it has been defeated. By the Jesus who is the resurrection and the life. By Him who burst His grave and ours.

By our Redeemer, who does not hold our sins against us, but took them upon Himself, so that we may live in peace and joy.

And that this peace and joy may be ours as well, is why Jesus gives His peace *twice* to His disciples that night.

Did you notice the repetition?

First, Jesus gives His peace to those frightened and sinful men, **then** He gives it

a second time, that they now give it to others, in their office as apostles.

Jesus now commissions and sends them with the Keys to the Kingdom, to bind and to loose the chains of sin.

Just as Jesus was sent from the Father with His authority, so now Jesus sends them with His authority. He breathes His Holy Spirit upon them.

Why? Didn't they have it before? Yes, they did, as Christians. But now He gives it to them for their office, so that they might give Christ's peace to others.

And then He "ordains" them – that is, He gives them their orders: **Go and forgive**. Forgive, just as I have forgiven you. Forgive freely and generously.

Forgive the sins of those who are penitent; and withhold the sins of those who are not, so they may see their sin, repent, and receive this forgiveness too. Forgive, so that **blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed**.

Blessed as well with My forgiveness, life, salvation, and peace. And that YOUR blessing. That is why at the beginning of the service I speak the words of absolution as I do.

Almighty God in His mercy has given His Son to die for you and for His sake forgives you all your sins.

That's Easter. That's Jesus death and resurrection. That's all that the Father sent His Son to do for you.

But that's not all I say. Then, **as a called and ordained servant of Christ, and by His authority . . .** There's what we heard today – the calling, commissioning, and sending of servants to give the forgiveness and peace won by Christ.

And so I continue: **I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.**

Thus, it is not me pronouncing your sins are forgiven, but the One who sent me; who sent me here for you. Because He wants to come here, into *this* day, and set you free.

Your Lord wants you to be sure. Sure of your life and forgiveness, and that you receive what you need the most.

I remind you that I am not here because I decided to be here, but because I was put here, by the call of God issued through this congregation

In the same way, you do not come here (when you're allowed to) unless the Holy Spirit called, gathered and enlightened you.

I do not speak the words of absolution by my own authority, but by the authority of Jesus, given to this office, to speak on His behalf.

So that the forgiveness and peace won by Jesus in His death and resurrection, might be the forgiveness and peace given to you, personally.

Pastors speak those words in response to your confession so that you be not hopeless or helpless, but filled with the life and the joy that God created you to have, and wants you to live.

And what effect did that forgiveness and peace have on the disciples? We see it in the reading we heard from Acts.

No longer do they lock themselves in an upper room, filled with fear – now they cannot be shut up! Now they rejoice at being counted worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus!

They are like all new people . . . for in fact they were. Made new by Jesus. By His life. By His resurrection. By the confidence of His victory over all our foes.

And He won that victory for you as well. He doesn't say touch my hands and side, but eat my body and drink my blood, giving us the medicine of immortality.

The same resurrected body and blood, to strengthen us and lead us from unbelief to faith. From doubt to certainty.

From fear to forgiveness. From death to life.

That raised and set free, you live the life He has given you to live, in *your* place, in *your* vocation, whatever it may be.

Luther said, ***"To be convinced in our hearts that we have forgiveness of sins and peace with God by grace alone is the hardest thing."***

Therefore one role of the pastor is to facilitate and strengthen your faith in the forgiveness won by Christ so that whatever station you have in life, you'll know that you're called and empowered by the Holy Spirit to love and serve and forgive just as He first loved, served and forgave you.

That all may see in your life, the life and joy of Christ.

That Easter be not only an historical event – but a reality in your everyday life.

That His forgiveness won, might be His forgiveness given, and forgiveness lived. For Christ is risen! [He is risen indeed! Alleluia!] ***Peace be with you.*** Amen.