

## Jesus blesses with powerful peace.

Text: John 20:19-31 for 4/8/2018 by Pastor Bolwerk

*<sup>19</sup> 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!" <sup>20</sup> After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup> Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." <sup>22</sup> And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." <sup>24</sup> Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> So 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." <sup>26</sup> 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!" <sup>27</sup> 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." <sup>28</sup> Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" <sup>29</sup> Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." <sup>30</sup> Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. <sup>31</sup> But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

You are walking down a dimly lit path. It's warm and you hear many strange sounds. Suddenly, to your right, you see a live, 500-pound Bengal tiger standing less than ten feet away, and it is looking right at you! What thoughts are going through your head at that moment? Are you thinking how you might get away? Are you wondering how you might possibly defend yourself? Maybe you're wondering how your spouse is going to spend your life insurance money? But on a more serious note: What emotions are you feeling when you see that tiger? Doubt? Fear? Panic?

But what if instead of feeling any of those things you felt peace? Peace? Could you actually feel at peace if you came face-to-face with a Bengal tiger? You could, if the tiger were in a zoo. The strong enclosures at the zoo keeps people safe so they can spend time looking at dangerous animals without having to be afraid.

Not having to be afraid is good because life can be scary. There is so much in this life that is out of our control, and those things can cause us fear and doubt. Today our Lord, Jesus, gives us something that helps us deal with the "out-of-our-control" things in this life. Through his Gospel writer John, we learn that ...

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1. Peace that removes fear.
2. Peace that removes doubt.

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Fear: It is an emotion caused by the anticipation or awareness of danger. Think of that Bengal tiger. And we can feel fear regardless of whether the danger is real or not. If you think something bad can or will happen to you then those thoughts can cause you to feel fear. The disciples were afraid, and the Apostle John tells us why. He says that, **“the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews”** (v. 19). The disciples fear was caused by what they thought the Jewish leaders were going to do to them. It can be easy to downplay the disciples fear since we know what is going to happen next. But let’s look at things from their perspective for a moment. The disciples believed Jesus was the almighty Son of God. They had seen Jesus heal incurable diseases, walk on water, and raise people from the dead. They believed Jesus was powerful enough to defeat their enemies. Then the Jewish leaders arrest Jesus, wrongly accuse him of blasphemy, and then force Pontius Pilate to execute Jesus by crucifixion. From the perspective of the disciples the Jewish leaders seemed to have the power to kill the Almighty Son of God! And if they could kill God’s Son, the Jewish leader could certainly kill them. The disciples certainly had a reason to be afraid.

Until Jesus comes along and removes their fear. **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** (v. 19-20). Jesus does three things to remove the disciples fear. First, stands among them. The doors are locked. Jesus doesn’t knock and ask to be let in, he simply passes through a locked door and stands among his fearful disciples, showing them his power as God. Next, he blesses them with something they desperately need at that moment: peace. Finally, Jesus shows them the marks that prove it is really him: the nail marks in his hands and the cut in his side from the soldier’s spear.

But then Jesus repeats what he said. John writes, **“Again Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you!’”** (v. 21). Jesus doesn’t want his disciples to miss what is most important, and that is his peace! This is a powerful peace. Jesus’ peace means freedom from fear and guilt. Because of Christ’s saving work a person no longer has to fear God’s wrath and judgment for sin. Jesus’ peace also removes guilt. Think of all the guilt the disciples may have been carrying for those three days: They had abandoned Jesus, running away when Jesus was arrested. They did not speak up for Jesus when he was being accused. Peter had even denied being one of Jesus’ disciples. But now their Lord’s physical presence gives the disciples peace.

It is a powerful peace because Jesus physical presence proves that God the Father accepted his Son’s payment for sins. Christ’s presence proves that he has defeated death and the grave. Jesus rising from the dead proves that because he lives, one day all his believers will live with him eternally.

What are things that you fear? Do you fear someone hurting you physically, mentally, or emotionally? Do you fear the aches and pains of old age? A debilitating illness? Loneliness? Maybe you fear a disaster that wipes you out financially. Maybe you fear for your children. Maybe you fear death and the judgment that will follow. We all know the sins we have committed, and each of those sins has eternal consequences. We also know that we are powerless to do anything to fix the problems our sins have brought upon us. Having no control over something can cause us to be afraid.

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How does Jesus give us peace in the face of our fears? The Gospel writer John tells us, **“Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name”** (vs. 30, 31). Christ made sure that his resurrection was recorded in the Scriptures so that this wonderful life-giving news could be shared with you. Through this word of God that you are hearing today, faith is being built up in your hearts. That God-given faith trusts that Jesus is the Christ, the risen and eternal Son of God. Through that faith Jesus gives us a new life. Through the power of his word Christ creates in us the ability to trust God’s promise of forgiveness. Jesus’ powerful blessing of peace helps us to live this life for his glory. Our Lord also fills us with the hope of an eternal life. Jesus blesses us with his powerful peace. It is a peace that removes our fear of God’s judgment. It is a peace that fills us with the contentment of knowing our Lord is always with us, so that even when we face our worst fears we can have peace.

As we continue looking at this text from the Apostle John we find that when Jesus blesses with his powerful peace, the peace that he gives is a peace that removes doubt.

Doubt is something that causes us uncertainty, hesitation, or even a lack of confidence. But what causes doubt? Doubt can be caused by a lack of knowledge or experience with something. Think of the first time you got behind the wheel of a car. A lack of experience may have caused you to doubt if you could drive such a complicated vehicle. Or think of when the first smart phones came out. The creators of that technology said it can help you be better organized and get things done faster all while keeping you connected to people. Many people didn’t understand how the technology worked, so they said that smartphones were just a fad that would not last. Yet smartphone technology has lasted. A lack of knowledge caused people to doubt. But doubt can also come from pride. If a person thinks they are smarter or better than others they may doubt what others say, even if those who are speaking are experts.

Thomas’ doubt seems to be a little bit of both. Thomas did not seem to understand the power Jesus has as God to raise the dead. Perhaps he believed Jesus could raise others but not himself. Thomas doubted Jesus’ power. Thomas’ pride also seemed to get in the way of him believing what his fellow disciples told him. When the other disciples say they have seen Jesus alive Thomas seems to think they are crazy. It’s almost as if Thomas is saying he is smarter than the others because he knows the dead don’t come back to life on their own. He refuses to believe the other disciples until he sees the proof with his own eyes.

What are the things in this life that cause us to doubt that Jesus is alive and caring for us? Pride can cause doubt. We have “little” problems that we face every day, problems that we feel we can handle on our own. We don’t need Jesus help with those “little” problems, besides those problems are so small Jesus isn’t going to deal with those things. Our pride can cause us to doubt that our Lord cares about every aspect of our lives. Or when we don’t understand how Jesus is going to help us through the big problems of life: an automobile accident, the death of a loved one, a lawsuit, huge medical bills, being betrayed, or taken advantage of, or hurt. We cannot see or understand how this problem could ever be solved, so we doubt that even Jesus can solve it.

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Jesus deals with our doubt in the same way he dealt with Thomas' doubt: With his words. **Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"** <sup>27</sup> **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"** (vs. 26, 27). What was Thomas' response when he heard this? **Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"** **Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed"** (vs. 28, 29).

We have not seen Jesus, yet we believe in him. Because we believe without seeing Jesus we are blessed. But we believe because the very words Jesus spoke created that belief in us. The Apostle Paul said to the Roman Christians that faith comes through the word of Christ. Jesus' words create and sustain faith because his words are filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit works through that word to create faith and change hearts to accept the words of our Lord. By the power of his Spirit Jesus' words of peace remove our doubts, comfort our souls with his forgiveness, and gives us peace.

And that peace comes with the power to share that peace with others. Jesus said, **"If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven"** (v. 23a). Through faith in Christ you are forgiven of all your sins. That means that you are at peace with God. And you can now share that peace by letting others know that they are also forgiven of all of their sins through Jesus. Jesus saving work on the cross paid for *all* sins. Because of Christ's death and resurrection God has forgiven all sins – all of them; there are no sins left to be forgiven! That means that all who trust in Jesus' forgiveness can also proclaim forgiveness in his name. When you proclaim the forgiveness of Christ to someone you are sharing with that person the blessing of Jesus' powerful peace.

Where there is forgiveness there is peace. Just as Jesus shared his peace with his disciples so he shares that peace with you. Our risen and living Savior shares with you the power of his peace. It is the peace of sins forgiven. It is the peace of having a right relationship with your heavenly Father. It is the peace of knowing that in all things God continues to work for your good. It is the peace of Christ that removes your fears and fills you with the hope of eternal life. Amen.