

April 23, 2017
Sermon for the 2nd Sunday of Easter
St Peter Lutheran Church
Bowie, TX
Larry Knobloch, Pastor
John 20:19-31

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

John 20:19–31 (ESV)

Jesus Appears to the Disciples

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.” 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 any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”

Jesus and Thomas

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.”

The Purpose of This Book

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.

Grace, Mercy, and Peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Every year the church celebrates Easter, and every year the reading for the Sunday after Easter is the text you just heard. This Sunday could be called “Pick on Thomas Sunday.” Thomas was late for church, someone else probably sat in his pew and worst of all, he missed Jesus. Since Thomas missed Jesus, he issued his now-famous challenge: *“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.”*

We know how that turned out. Jesus showed up the following Sunday and answered Thomas’ challenge: 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.”*

Stop doubting and believe!

So, Thomas believed and everything proceeded hunky-dory ... well, not quite.

We pick on Thomas because of his unbelief, but Thomas wasn’t alone in his skepticism. **None** of the disciples believed Jesus would rise until He showed himself to them. Listen to how the disciples first reacted to the news of the resurrection: *“When [the women] came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.” (Luke 24)*

Nonsense! None of the disciples believed that Christ has risen. _____

None of them believed!

That’s one of the things that makes the Resurrection account believable. The disciples didn’t believe what Jesus had told them about His dying and rising. That’s how we know the Resurrection accounts are not just human fiction.

If the disciples had dreamed up the story of the Resurrection, it would probably have sounded more like this. "We, the loyal followers of Jesus, fully understood what he told us about his rising from the dead. That's why we faithfully stood by Jesus when he was arrested, during his mock trial, and throughout his suffering and crucifixion. That's why we carefully took his body from the cross and laid it in the tomb. That's why we held a vigil at the tomb while we waited for him to rise, singing psalms and praying."

That's how a made up account of the Resurrection would sound.

What actually happened was Jesus told His disciples He would suffer, die, and rise in three days, but they didn't get it.

They were more interested in arguing over who was the most important. And then, when, at Gethsemane, they figured out that trouble was brewing, they ran like scared sheep.

When the women told the disciples that Jesus had risen, they thought those women were hallucinating. The disciples didn't just doubt, they flat out didn't believe. When the truth is revealed, we see the disciples as cowards who refused to believe the best news in the world.

Christ is Risen!

While Jesus lay in the tomb, the disciples were unbelievers; held in the grip of fear and unbelief just like any pagan. They weren't just doubting they were unbelieving, and their unbelief was sin.

Now, before we get too hard on the disciples, Thomas included, we need to remember an important fact. We all came into this world as unbelievers.

In the rite of baptism we hear this: *We learn from the Word of God that we all are conceived and born sinful and are in need of forgiveness. We would be lost forever unless delivered from sin, death, and everlasting condemnation. But the Father of all mercy and grace has sent his Son Jesus Christ, who atoned for the sin of the whole world that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

Because we were all born as enemies of God, it's important to hear the words from today's text:

"Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"

The disciples were hiding behind locked doors – afraid – hopeless – unbelieving.

However, Jesus came and declared His peace to them.

Jesus wasn't angry over their lack of faith. He was kind and patient. He gently restored their faith. Then they knew that Jesus didn't just die, but He also rose.

Three times Jesus announces peace to His disciples. Jesus' primary mission on earth was to restore peace between God and man. Thousands of years before, Satan has seduced people into being enemies of God. Enemies who didn't deserve peace.

But Jesus came into the world as one of us. He lived a life of perfect obedience to God's will. He allowed Himself to be crucified as full payment for the sins of all people.

He literally took the punishment we deserve. Then He rose from the dead to defeat death itself. He earned our forgiveness. He restored peace with God, and that is the peace He extended to His disciples; the peace He gives to us.

The peace Jesus gave to the disciples took a very specific form: *"Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."* With those words, Jesus changed His disciples into His apostles; no longer just followers, but advocates of the Gospel.

The word apostle comes from the Greek meaning: to send. As the Father commissioned Jesus to be His apostle (His sent one) to the world, Jesus now commissions those disciples to be His apostles.

The mission of these new apostles: take the peace of Jesus and proclaim it to the whole world.

Sounds a little crazy, doesn't it. These are the men who worried so much about who was the most important they didn't have time for what Jesus said.

These are the men who abandoned Jesus in His hour of greatest earthly need.

These are the men who thought the news of the Resurrection were just urban legend.

These are the men who drew a blank every time Jesus told them what was going to happen.

These were not the brightest stars in the sky; not the shiniest pennies in the purse, not the sharpest knives in the drawer.

So how could this lame group of misfits carry out the mission Jesus gave them?

They didn't – God did. God worked in these men and changed them from disciples to apostles.

These men who promised to show up ready for battle found out the battle had already been won. These men who wanted to be soldiers for Jesus learned their real job was to be witnesses for Jesus.

In His commissioning, Jesus gave these fledgling apostles some very special authority: *“Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”* Jesus gave them the power to administer the forgiveness He had won on the cross – the forgiveness that brings us peace with a holy God.

Did all of this have a positive effect on these frightened disciples. We learn in Acts chapter 5 that the Jewish rulers: *“... called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.”*

On Easter morning they were cowardly unbelievers. Later, they rejoiced at being worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus. Only God can bring that kind of change.

The apostles have long since died and joined their Savior in God's eternal kingdom, but the mission continues. Jesus still sends men and women into the world to deliver His message of peace.

The Holy Spirit worked through the apostles to establish congregations of believers.

The Holy Spirit also established the Office of Holy Ministry. As the apostle Paul writes:

“¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,” (Eph 4:11-12)

Today’s text shows the mind-boggling enormity of God’s mercy and grace.

Jesus showed Himself to a group of unbelieving cowards.

He gave them the peace of God.

He commissioned them to be His apostles.

He breathed the Holy Spirit into them.

He gave them the authority to administer the forgiveness He earned on the cross.

They deserved none of this, but they received it as a free gift of God’s grace.

Just like those apostles, you have received God’s mercy and grace.

You are in possession of God’s peace.

You have been sent into the world to tell the message of the Gospel.

You have received the Holy Spirit.

And all of this is a free gift from the God who loves you enough to die for you.

The God whose peace passes all understanding, may He give you a peace that will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen.