

Sermon for Easter 2

April 8, 2018

“Jesus Gives Peace”

Grace, mercy, and peace are yours from Jesus who gives peace with his presence. Amen.

Fellow disciples and followers of Jesus, our God wants us to have peace and to know that we are secure in his mighty hands. But fear and doubt want to steal that peace away from us. We saw it with the disciples hiding out because of fear and with Thomas who doubted what the other disciples were telling him, and he had to wait a whole extra week for peace!

Fear wants to rob us of the peace that Jesus gives, and the trick of fear is to focus on the problem so much that you forget about the solution. Peter walked on water when he trusted Jesus, but when he looked instead at the wind and waves coming towards him, fear took over and he sank.

The disciples were together behind locked doors because of their fear of the Jews. Where the chief priests going to come and get them too? Those men had used the Sanhedrin as their own personal kangaroo court, showing that they were willing to bend and break the laws of the Jews and the laws of God to get rid of Jesus. Would they be that ruthless to come and get Jesus' closest followers? The disciples were playing a terrifying game of hide-and-seek from the men who killed Jesus! They did not have peace.

What are we afraid of that robs us of peace?

Are you healthy? You know of people who suffered greatly at the end of life on this earth, do you wish that your end will come quickly and peacefully, but you worry that a stroke will leave you crippled and unable to talk for years, or that your knees will go bad and you'll be stuck in a wheelchair?

Do you worry about taking care of aging parents or family? How will you manage to do all the work you do now, plus find time for doctor appointments and special care?

Do you worry that big important men in expensive suits gathered around a big conference table are going to vote, and their vote will make your farm or your ranch unsustainable and you will have to sell?

Fear robs us of peace, not because there aren't real, serious things to think about, but because it focuses us only on the problem, and not on the solution that God gives.

Doubt also robs us of peace, like it did for Thomas. The rest of the disciples rejoiced when they saw Jesus, and for a whole week, they were telling Thomas to believe it, but he didn't. He did not believe that Jesus would be back alive, even though his best friends were all telling him that they saw Jesus, alive.

What do you think that week was like for Thomas? How many times do you think he told his best friends to shut up with their silly ideas? What did he think? That maybe they all needed the fresh air he had gotten, and that they'd been cooped up for too long and were crazy? And if Jesus was alive, why wouldn't he come around for a whole week again? Whatever thoughts were running through Thomas' head, he did not have peace.

When do doubts rob us of peace?

Like Thomas, we hear the good news of God, and we can hear it as often as we like. But do we hear good news from in church, in the sermons, sing about it in the hymns, but then dismiss it? “Sure, that sounds nice pastor, but that's not how real life really works.”

Do we doubt because we don't like God's solution? Sometimes we get so fixated on a problem that we also get fixated on the only solution we can think of, and if God doesn't promise us that solution, then we're not interested. The apostle Paul prayed that God would take away the "thorn in the flesh," whatever that painful ailment was. And certainly, you'd think that removing a disability would have let Paul preach to even more people, but God said no. Instead, God promised to give him the strength to endure it.

Do we ever doubt because we don't think that what God says is really for us, and that maybe he meant other people or other people's problems, but that our situation is too tough or too different that God couldn't have had me in mind with his promises?

Doubt robs us of peace by making us deaf to the clear and true promises of God so that we don't listen to the solution God offers.

Fear and doubt would rob of us peace that God wants us to have. The solution, is Jesus, who gives peace with his presence.

See how the scared, fearful disciples react when Jesus appears – they rejoiced. They had peace again, because Jesus was back.

See how Thomas changed his tune, "My Lord and my God!" He was convinced, and he was back at peace, and back in harmony with the other disciples.

What changed? Jesus was there. It's not that Jesus hadn't been with them in many ways that whole time, but they put their focus back on Jesus, and his promises, and they had peace again.

Jesus gives us peace, too, and he does it by being present with us. He's with us in many ways; today we'll think of just three ways that Jesus is with us to give us peace.

The first is the Pax (pax is Latin for peace). That's a tiny little part in our liturgy during the communion service. After the words of institution, the minister says, "The peace of the Lord be with you always." That comes from this text, where Jesus says, three times, "Peace be with you." That's the "peace of the Lord" we're talking about there. We say it, and think about the disciples in the locked room who were comforted with Jesus' presence in the room. We say it, and remember that Jesus is with us who are gathered in his name and in that special presence of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

But he's not only with us in the Sacrament and at the worship service – so line goes "with you always," because the peace we are given and assured of in the Sacrament and in the service are portable, and go with you all week long.

Jesus is also with us in the Keys. "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whenever you forgive people's sins, they are forgiven. Whenever you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." In worship, we have our called servant of Christ, by the authority of Christ, announce, "I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." It's as valid and certain as if Jesus himself came down and told you, "I forgive you all your sins." Christians do the same thing, you do the same thing, when a spouse says to a spouse, "I forgive you." And when a parent says to a child, "I forgive you." It's as valid and certain as if Jesus himself came down and said, "You are forgiven."

And, in so many places, accessible in so many ways, Jesus is with us in the Word. He declared it, "You search the Scriptures...they testify about me!" In John's Gospel, he begins calling Jesus the Word, "The Word became flesh and dwelled among us. We have seen his glory, the glory he has as the only-begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." Jesus promised us that he is the Light of the World, and the psalm declares, "Your words are a lamp for my feet and a light for my path." The voice of the Bible is the voice of Jesus, our God, who is with us.

Things that cause fear are all around us. Serious, real dangers have us cornered. Doubt tells us not to listen to God's solution, or that God's solution is for other people but not for me. Fight fear, fight doubt with Jesus' presence. It's declared to you in the Pax every time we celebrate the Lord's Supper. Jesus is with you. It's declared to you in the absolution in worship and in the forgiveness given to you by fellow Christians. Jesus is with you. You have the Word, in which Jesus speaks to you. Jesus is with you, and he says, "Peace be with you!" Amen.

Text: *John 20:19-31*

Jesus gives his disciples peace, for themselves, and for the world, through forgiveness.

¹⁹On the evening of that first day of the week, the disciples were together behind locked doors because of their fear of the Jews. Jesus came, stood among them, and said to them, "Peace be with you!" ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. So the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

²¹Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you! Just as the Father has sent me, I am also sending you." ²²After saying this, he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³Whenever you forgive people's sins, they are forgiven. Whenever you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

²⁴But Thomas, one of the Twelve, the one called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵So the other disciples kept telling him, "We have seen the Lord!"

But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands, and put my finger into the mark of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will never believe."

²⁶After eight days, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them. "Peace be with you," he said. ²⁷Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and look at my hands. Take your hand and put it into my side. Do not continue to doubt, but believe."

²⁸Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"

²⁹Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

³⁰Jesus, in the presence of his disciples, did many other miraculous signs that are not written in this book. ³¹But 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.