

Second Sunday of Easter – April 28, 2019

John 20:19-31

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

Different cultures and different languages of course will use different words to describe the same concept. At the time of the New Testament, for the Greeks, the word was *eiraenae* (from which comes the English name Irene); for the Romans the word was *pax* or *pacem*, for the Jews, the word was *shalom*. Our word for it today is peace, which actually comes from the word the Romans used in Latin. For the Jews *shalom* was more than just the word for peace, it was also a greeting and a farewell, *shalom alechem*, peace be to you! That was the greeting that Jesus used with his disciples on that first Easter evening, but it was much more than just him saying hello. It spoke of the peace that they had through Jesus, the same peace that we have today. As we look at our text from John chapter 20, we will focus on the importance of that greeting, **“Peace be with you!”** First, **it calms our fears**, and second, **it answers our doubts**.

The first part of verse 19 sets the scene: “On the evening of that first day of the week, (when) the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews.” Things at that moment were not so peaceful for the disciples. They were gathered together with the doors locked, afraid to go outside because of what the Jewish leaders might do to them. They had seen their leader and teacher arrested on Thursday night and after a quick judicial process, executed on Friday afternoon. They probably thought the same thing would happen to them if they did not go into hiding for the time being. Coupled with this fear of death was the uncertainty that had come on Sunday. Jesus’ body was no longer in the tomb, Peter and John had seen it empty. The women had come reporting to have seen Jesus alive and so too did the Emmaus disciples. And so they did not know what to think anymore. What would happen to them? What would the future hold? Without any answers, they gathered to wait for what would happen next.

“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” (vv. 19b-20). Jesus’ greeting was more than just saying “hi.” The disciples could now have peace

that calmed their fears. Jesus was not dead, the reports they had heard throughout that Sunday were all true. He was standing there in front of them, not as a ghost or spirit, but in the flesh, showing his wounded hands and side. They would not be left alone to face the Jewish leaders who would still want to kill them, they had Jesus on their side. They rejoiced to learn that everything that Jesus had taught them, everything he had trained them to do was still going to be in their future.

The disciples feared for their lives with their leader having been killed, a fear that Christians in this world still face in places where they are under persecution. Although we do not face that same specific fear in our country, at least not yet, there are plenty of other fears that consume us. There is a fear of the finish. The uncertainty of not knowing when we will die, the uncertainty of not knowing how we will die. There is a fear of failure. We can't control ourselves and stop giving in to our sinful habits, at what point do we lose control, at what point is it all too much? There is a fear of the future. What will happen to our jobs, our health or our finances? What will this world be like for our children and grandchildren? All these fears and many more can distract us in this life, consuming our attention, so that it's like we find our ourselves hiding in a room with the doors locked, a prisoner of our own fears.

And so Jesus comes to us with those same words, "Peace be with you!" When it comes to a fear of the finish, we have peace because even though we may not know the when or the how of our death, we know the end result. Because of Jesus' life and death, we have an eternal life in heaven waiting for us. Because Jesus rose from the dead, someday we too will rise from the dead. When it comes to a fear of failure, we have peace in knowing that God's love is limitless and all of our sins are forgiven. We are not left alone to battle the temptations that we face, but our strength comes from Jesus who defeated the power of sin and the power of the devil to torment us. When it comes to fear of the future, we have peace in knowing that our God will provide for us. He has promised to take care of us in this world with what we need. When times come that we are lacking because of the effects of sin in this world, it only makes us all the more ready for heaven. Our peace will never be perfect in this world as our sinful nature will plague us with different fears. But because of Jesus' death and resurrection, we know someday all of our fears will end as we are freed from the prison of this world and enter into the freedom of heaven.

As the disciples gathered on that first Easter evening, not everyone was there. Verse 24: "Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came." For whatever reason, Thomas was absent. When the other disciples told him what he had missed, he expressed his doubts: "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" (v. 25b). When Jesus appeared the next week, Thomas would be there and Jesus would give him the same greeting of peace and show him the proof he was looking for. When Jesus told him, "Stop doubting and believe" (v. 27b), Thomas did just that as he confessed (v. 28), "My Lord and my God!" He now saw Jesus for who he was, his doubts were answered.

So what doubts do we wrestle with when it comes to our God? Sometimes we doubt his divinity. It's not so much that we question whether Jesus was God. It's more often that we get so wrapped up in trying to manage our lives and solve our problems that we forget who we have to help us in our lives. Sometimes we doubt God's details. He has given us his laws for us to follow, all the details of how he wants us to live our lives, what is sin and what isn't sin. Yet sometimes we doubt his will and question whether we know better than him how we should live in this world. Sometimes we doubt God's decisions. We look at our lives and the direction

things are going and question why is God allowing this to happen to me? Why isn't my life going the way I wanted or the way I thought it would turn out?

Here too Jesus comes to us with those same words, "Peace be with you!" When it comes to doubting his divinity, we have peace in knowing that we have a God who is all-knowing and all-powerful and ever present, who is more than capable of managing the problems we face in our lives. When it comes to doubting his details, we have peace in knowing that his will, his rules for our lives are intended for our good and will be a blessing, not a burden as we follow them each and every day. When it comes to doubting his direction, we have peace in knowing that God has promised to work out all things for our good (Ro 8:28), not so that we have the good life in this world, but the good life to come in heaven.

Jesus came to his disciples with a message of peace. He calmed their fears and answered their doubts. He was not dead, but had risen. He had won the victory over sin, death and the devil. That same message of peace applies to our lives as well. In times of fear, we have the peace of knowing that our Savior has conquered our enemies and will continue to be with us. In times of doubt, we have the peace of knowing our God is in control and working things out for our eternal good. Our text contains one more use of that greeting in verse 21: "Again Jesus said, 'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.'" The disciples would take that peace and travel to the ends of the earth with it, sharing the good news of Jesus' life and death and resurrection. Traditions tell us that Thomas perhaps made it as far east as India. That commission of the disciples is the same for us. We too share Jesus' peace with the world. Through our witnessing, through our prayers, and through our offerings the Holy Spirit can use us, so that others may have their fears calmed and their doubts answered with that same message of peace. Amen.