

John 20:19-31
Second Sunday of Easter
April 24, 2022

Easter is a joyous time. Wasn't it great to see more pews filled last Sunday and hear the hymns and all the Alleluias with greater volume? The flowers and banners added to the festive spirit. That is proper, for Easter has a tremendous message about our risen Savior, one impacting our lives.

There is another emotion that Easter brings, and that is peace. It is valuable, for we live in a world that brings disturbances to our peace of mind. What causes all problems is sin, which disrupts our relationship with God and with one another. When Jesus appeared to his followers on Easter evening he repeatedly assured them of peace. We join them in receiving it.

THE LIVING JESUS BRINGS PEACE

- I. To calm our fears
- II. Through use of the Keys
- III. To overcome doubts
- IV. To those who have not seen

The band of believers who gathered that Sunday evening had fears. It showed in their having the doors locked. They knew what the enemies had done to their beloved Jesus. They may have heard the report that the guards had been paid to spread, that the disciples had stolen his body while they slept. Somebody could come looking for them at any moment.

Then there were the reports: Mary Magdalene had told them of seeing the tomb open; Peter and John had run out and found it empty and undisturbed; the other women came back and told of the angels and of meeting Jesus afterwards. Just now the pair of believers had rushed back from Emmaus and told them their sudden recognition of Jesus and his vanishing after he had explained the Scriptures to them while they walked there. What should they make of it all?

"Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!'" As the walls of the tomb had not held him in, so the walls of their meeting place did not keep him out. He was using the powers of his resurrection body and appeared suddenly.

The greeting of "Peace be with you!" was a common one, but what comfort it brought! It calmed their hearts startled by the unnatural entrance and by the presence of the holy Son of God now in his state of exaltation. The guilt of deserting him in the garden was forgiven as well as all other sins. Peace for troubled consciences was

present since he had died for our sins but was now back to life. His Father had accepted the payment. We are forgiven.

Lest they think they were deluded by overwrought emotions as they had viewed the earlier reports of the women who had been to the tomb, Jesus brought convincing proof as he showed them his hands and side with the wounds. It was truly their Lord now alive again. Present was the one who had been on the cross, certified as dead and placed in the tomb. They could see he was real. He also asked for food and ate with them, which added to the evidence.

At last they were convinced. "The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord." It was more than the reunion of friends that produced the joy. He had won the victory over sin, death and Satan. Peace filled them, driving out the earlier fear. You and I need that peace of Easter. What disturbs your peace of mind, keeping you awake at night or distressed during the day? Is it uneasiness about the future? Is it health concerns or finance, or for your safety? Fear can be crippling. It paralyzes us with inaction. We retreat behind our own locked doors, physically or symbolically, and do nothing, or we flit about frantically seeking help. Most of our fears reveal a lack of trust in the power and promises of our living Lord. We are afraid because we don't think he is able to help us. So our relationship with him needs attention first. It is sin that separates us from God. Receive peace and then reflect it in your approach to the trials and troubles of life. Come to the living Jesus and be assured of peace.

II.

The Savior's peace is not restricted. It is for all people. We share this peace. On that Easter evening in that room in Jerusalem Jesus provided a special way to do so, through the use of the Keys. He again announced peace—essential for you to have if you are going to share it. Then he said he was sending his followers out on a mission just as he had been sent. They had the same goal, namely, winning souls for eternity. He then breathed on them, imparting the Spirit, a fitting manner of doing so since the word "spirit" means "breath." Imparting the Spirit gave authority for the work assigned.

Combining what's recorded of that evening with what is contained elsewhere in the Word, we have directions for use of the gift bestowed. One key is the loosing key. "If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven." That key, the message of forgiveness, is to be used with penitent sinners. We don't just tell them about forgiveness. We actually give it. We can assure the grieving sinner that Jesus has removed their sins as far as the east is from the west, drowned them in the depths of the sea. They are gone from the record.

"If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven," Jesus continued. That's called the binding key. Sins are bound or held fast. Sin and its penalty still cling to them. It

happens not because Jesus didn't pay for their sins but because they have rejected his payment by impenitence. The binding of sins declares that if a person remains in that state, he or she will be lost eternally. It is a serious warning given in love to awaken the person to their condition and call them back to the Lord.

The message of Christ's forgiveness is one we need to receive, for we sin daily. How comforting it is to know the peace of his forgiveness at the end of the day as you review it and see your sins! You can rest in peace. It is comforting to hear another believer assure you of forgiveness, especially if it is the one you have wronged. Sharing our Savior's forgiveness is the only way Christian marriages can survive and the only way Christian families can function, for we regularly wrong each other as we live and work and play together. It is a joy to hear the words of forgiveness as we gather for worship and when we partake of Holy Communion. That message of peace is based on Easter. It is also a joy to share forgiveness when you know Easter's peace. The binding key aims at repentance so the wonderful news of forgiveness can be shared and bring God's peace to another soul.

III.

Jesus brought his message of peace to an individual, that is, to Thomas. It is to overcome doubts. Thomas was absent from the rest of the group on Easter evening. Why, we do not know. He could have had a valid reason, but he missed out on meeting the living Jesus. The other disciples eagerly shared the news because they wanted him to have the same peace.

Their repeated efforts meant nothing. Thomas did more than doubt—he stubbornly refused. "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." Despite the fact that these were friends talking to him and that they had not rushed off to hasty conclusions but needed some convincing themselves, he would not be persuaded.

His absence and continued rejection left Thomas without Easter joy and peace for the next week. That's not what Jesus wants for his followers, so he provided convincing proof. The following Sunday the disciples were again gathered under the same circumstances, except Thomas was present. Why they still had the doors locked, I don't know, but again Jesus miraculously appeared in the room.

He came not to scold Thomas, however, but to convince him of the truth. He met the objections which the disciple had raised exactly, inviting him to examine his wounds and calling for belief. We don't know whether Thomas actually had to follow through and touch the wounds of the Savior to be convinced. He was certain and confessed, "My Lord and my God!" He saw the truth and knew it was personally true for himself. His Savior lived, no doubt about it. The peace of Easter was his.

While we may puzzle at why Thomas had been so obstinate and still use the moniker "Doubting Thomas" in mild mockery of someone, we can be glad that he was at first reluctant to accept the news. That way we have even more proof that the miracle of Easter is absolutely true. We have an unshakeable foundation for our faith. Those extra efforts of Jesus were not required of him but were an act of grace and demonstrate his concern for an individual. That same concern he holds for each of us. We have our own blind spots and weaknesses. Jesus meets you where you are and provides just what you need to trust in him. Listen to him. He overcomes your doubts.

IV.

Yes, he comes to us still today, to those who have not seen. Not everyone has the opportunity for such a face-to-face meeting with Jesus. He praised the confession of Thomas but noted, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." Not everyone could be around for the ministry of Jesus to hear his teaching and witness his miracles. Many did not encounter him during the forty days from his resurrection to his ascension. But we do have the written Word of God, where the prophecies are recorded and the actions of Jesus they predicted. God the Holy Spirit works through the gospel to produce in our hearts the same certainty to which Thomas came.

John indicates that was the purpose of his writing: "By believing you may have life in his name." He was talking about spiritual life now and the eternal life to come. It is what Jesus won, what Easter celebrates and what Scripture reveals.

By faith see your Savior in his Word. Know the blessings he provides, now and forever. Have peace and security in your heart. Use the Word. Read and study it regularly. Your peace will increase. Easter will remain with you.

Sometimes we look down on Easter Christians, those who only show up in God's house on that day. Actually we all want to be Easter Christians in another sense, living each day, meeting each moment, with the positive outlook that Easter brings. View the evidence with Thomas and the disciples. Use and receive the Keys. Most of all, let the message of the Word penetrate your heart. Know the risen Savior and live in peace.