

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church

Shobonier, Illinois

Easter 2C

April 27, 2025

John 20:19-31

That You May Believe and Have Life

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. (John 20:30-31 ESV)

In the name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world,

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

On that first Easter evening, the disciples were gathered together behind locked doors - without Thomas. And while we may remember "doubting Thomas," the thrust of the Gospel is about Jesus and the lengths to which He will go to bring His children to saving faith. Indeed, today we see not only the purpose of the resurrection, but the purpose of God's written Word. For truly, everything that the Bible says points us to Christ for the purpose of creating and sustaining saving faith in our hearts so that we may have eternal life - including this account.

So, the disciples had locked themselves in because they were afraid of the Jews. They had heard the reports from the women and from the Emmaus disciples who had seen Jesus. Peter and John had seen the empty tomb. Yet, they did not believe that Jesus was risen from the dead, that He really was alive.

And it's to those fearful unbelievers that Jesus appears. And the first thing He says is "Peace be with you." Not an unusual greeting perhaps, but certainly more meaningful than first meets the eye. "Peace be with you." What does this mean? The disciples had every right to be afraid when they saw Jesus. For it seems that all of them had fallen asleep when Jesus was in earnest prayer in the garden. All of them had fled when Jesus was arrested. They had spent three years with Jesus, and had seen and heard many miraculous and wonderful things. They had seen the sick healed, the dead raised, water changed into wine, and thousands fed with just a little food. They had heard Jesus proclaim the kingdom of God. They had seen Him take on the Pharisees and Sadducees and the whole of the Jewish hierarchy. They had heard Him preach day after day. They had heard Him say more than once that He would be turned over to sinful men, be killed and rise on the third day. They had seen Him die on the cross. Yet, they did not believe.

They had gathered behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jews. After all, if they killed Jesus, they might very well kill them too, or so they thought. So, when Jesus appears, the first thing He does is forgive them. "Peace be with you." To be sure, this peace was not the removal of the danger, after all, the Jews were still out there. Rather, this peace was the restoration of a good relationship with Him and the Father. This word of peace is one of forgiveness. And this word, accompanied by His physical presence, wounds and all, led the disciples to faith.

Yet, their faith, or their lack of faith, didn't make Jesus' appearance or words any less real or true. Jesus' words were true regardless of what the disciples felt about them. But when those gracious words fell on those ears, the words created the faith which received them with joy. Indeed, "the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord." Jesus' Word of peace did what it said, it gave peace to those who heard. Jesus had turned their unbelief to faith.

And again, Jesus says, "Peace to you!" Lest there be any lingering doubts about the reality of His love and forgiveness, He assures them that they have been set right with God. Then He tells them about their mission. They are being sent to forgive and retain sins. They are being sent, that's why they're called Apostles. Their job is to forgive the sins of all who are repentant, and to announce to those who refuse to repent that their sins are not forgiven. But this is not just their word, it is Christ's Word. They are being sent by His command and with His authority.

Now all of this happens so that the disciples might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. It happens so they will believe that Jesus is the promised Messiah and that He is their Savior from sin and death. Having had their sins forgiven, they are sent out to preach sin and grace, law and gospel, repentance and forgiveness. And that's the same reason pastors are sent out today. They have the same charge - to forgive the sins of the penitent and to bind the sins of the impenitent - all for the purpose of turning unbelief into saving faith.

The following week, what had happened with the rest of the disciples, now happened with Thomas. You see, Thomas didn't believe what he had been told about Jesus, just as the other disciples hadn't believed what they'd been told. Now, he may have believed that the tomb was empty. He had had a whole week to check that out. But He refused to believe the disciples when they told him that Jesus had risen and that they had seen Him. Perhaps Thomas' demand to "see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side," is a reflection of what he had heard from the others. After all, they \*had seen\* the risen Christ, they \*had seen\* His wounds. So Thomas is really no different from the others.

So, just as Jesus had appeared a week earlier, He does so again. And again, Jesus says, "Peace to you!" Again, Jesus forgives their sins. Again, Jesus pours out His grace and mercy upon them to comfort them and to assure them that they are still the beloved of God. Then He specifically addresses Thomas. "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing." Jesus wanted Thomas to believe that He really was alive, that He really had risen from the dead. More than that, Jesus wanted Thomas to know and believe that his sins were forgiven too.

After all, Jesus didn't appear to His disciples merely to convince them He really was alive. He appeared to them to forgive their sins and assure them that His death and resurrection was for each of them. He appeared to them to tell them, to remind them, of all that they had heard and seen. He appeared to them to make forgiveness and eternal life personal to each one of them.

And the effect it had was the confession of Thomas, "My Lord and my God!" That's the cry of saving faith. That's the confession of all true believers in Christ. For it is not simply an acknowledgment that Jesus had died and was now alive. Rather, that Jesus is \*my\* Lord and

\*my\* God. The Lord we serve and the God we worship is a living Lord and a living God who died for our sins on the cross, but who is now alive. This is the purpose of the resurrection appearances. Jesus appeared and showed Himself to the disciples, and especially to Thomas, so that they would trust in Him for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus wanted them to know that they were at peace with God because of His own death and resurrection.

And it's the same with us. Jesus appears to us today as well. He is with us in the flesh. And this is true whether we believe it or not. And you don't have to take my word for it, take His. "This is my body given for you. This is my blood shed for the remission of your sins." His Word does what it says. For He comes to give us His living body and blood so that we too can have the peace that passes understanding. We too need to hear with our own ears those marvelous words, "Peace be with you."

And as those words fall on our ears, Jesus turns our unbelief to faith. As those words make their way to the heart, we learn by God's grace and power to believe those words. For "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17). By God's gracious favor, Christ comes to us and says, "Peace be to you." By His grace we are blessed because God has worked in us to believe those words and to have what they say, forgiveness, life, and salvation. We have peace with God because He says so. And because He says so, because we are the blessed of God in Christ, because we have the peace He gives, the only thing we can say is "My Lord and my God." To Him be the glory now and forever.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener