

2nd Sunday of Easter

John 20:19-31

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for the sermon this morning is the Gospel we heard before from John 20:19-31.

**19 That Sunday evening the doors had been locked where the disciples were, because they were afraid of the Jews. Then Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you!"**

**20 After He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. So 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, I also am sending you."**

**22 After He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit! 23 If you forgive any people's sins, they have been forgiven; if you retain any people's sins, they have been retained."**

**24 However, Thomas, one of the twelve, who was called "The Twin," was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord."**

**He told them, "Unless I see the marks of the nails in His hands and put my finger into the marks of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I shall certainly not believe."**

**26 A week later, His disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors had been locked, Jesus came and stood among them, and said, "Peace be with you!"**

**27 Next He told Thomas, "Put your finger here, and look at My hands! Take your hand and put it into My side! Stop your unbelief, and believe!"**

**28 Thomas answered Him, "My Lord and my God!"**

**29 Jesus asked him, "Have you believed because you have seen Me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed!"**

**30 Jesus also performed many other miraculous signs in the presence of His disciples, which have not been written in this book. 31 However, these things have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that, believing, you may have life in His name.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us in your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen

Dear friends in Christ,  
Peace be with you.

It was what we would call Sunday evening - the evening of the first Easter. A group of disciples, both men and women, were gathered together behind locked doors.

It was a time of great confusion for this little gathering. - Some of the women who were there had actually seen Jesus. - At least they said they had. John wrote that when he saw the empty tomb, he believed something, but it isn't quite clear what he believed. - Peter, too, had seen the empty tomb where Jesus was and they still didn't understand the scripture that said, "**that He must rise from the dead.**" - And in Luke it says two disciples from Emmaus had seen Him as well. [Luke24:13 ff]. - So, there were some there who had seen Jesus and believed, but most of them had not seen Him and these had no faith.

Furthermore, even if they all believed that Jesus had risen, they weren't quite sure what that meant or what if anything they should do about it. - Jesus had taught about His resurrection before He died, but His teachings didn't really sink in. - Because they weren't expecting the Messiah to die and rise from the dead, they had given no thought to how they would respond or what they would do afterwards. - They hadn't asked Jesus any questions about what they should do after He rose. They were in totally uncharted waters.

Then there was the perceived danger that the Jewish leaders might come after Jesus' followers. - The only thing they could think to do was to close ranks and meet behind locked doors. - Basically, all they wanted to do was to hide - to not draw any attention to themselves. - They wanted to become invisible to the Jewish authorities. - The group that gathered in that room on that evening was afraid and confused and depressed.

Then Jesus showed up. - It didn't make any difference that the doors were locked. It didn't make any difference that the disciples were trying to hide. It didn't make any difference that the disciples were

confused and bewildered. One second He wasn't there, and the next second He was there in the room with them!

As we read the record of Jesus' appearance to His disciples on that Easter evening, we learn that Jesus didn't wait for this little group to come to Him. He knew that would never happen. Instead He came to them. He appeared among them even though they had barricaded themselves into their hiding place.

You know He had every right to be angry with them. He had every right to say to them, "I went in and out among you for three years. I told you that I was going to rise after I died! What's your problem? Why didn't you believe the women when they told you that they saw me alive?" He had that right, but He didn't use it. He could have told them off, but He didn't. Instead, He came to them in peace. He said to them, "**Peace be with you.**" He patiently allowed them to examine the scars of the crucifixion. The Apostle John would later write about this event in his first epistle: **That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands ...**[1 John 1:1]. Here Jesus shows His love, His tenderness, His desire for all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. [1 Timothy 2:4].

What a comfort this is for us as well, we know that Jesus has every right to judge and condemn us for all the wrong we've done. Jesus has every right to scold us for ignoring His teachings. He has the right to punish us for the wrong we have done and the good we have left undone. Nevertheless, He comes to us just as He came to His disciples, and He comes in peace.

He not only comes to give us peace, but He also comes to give us authority. This is one of the amazing things about His relationship with us. - Here is this group of disciples. A few had some sort of meagre faith, but most of them had no faith at all. - When Jesus appeared to them, He didn't reproach them for their unbelief, sin, or weakness. Instead He comforted them, gave them strength, and lifted them up.

As He built them up, He gave them a new authority. Jesus said to them again, "**Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.**" And when he had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "**Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld.**" With these words, Jesus gives His Church the same authority that God the Father gave to Him.

With these words and many others, Jesus began telling His church about her mission. The Father sent the Son. The Son in turns sends the disciples. What a joy, comfort, and blessing it is that we can hear the words of Christ as He gave it to His disciples. What a treasure God preserves for us in the Bible, the book that presents the very teachings of Christ as He gave them to His messengers the prophets and the apostles. What a privilege, blessing, and joy we have as parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, friends, and associates to pass these teachings on to others in our lives. And we do have the privilege to pass these teachings on to others even as the apostles wrote them down and passed them on to us.

As Jesus sends us it also means that the words of the Lord's Prayer, "**Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us,**" are not just empty vibrations in the air. It means that we as believing children of God have the authority to forgive one another of our sins. It means that I, even though I'm a poor miserable sinner myself, that I as a called and ordained servant of the Word can speak for Jesus Christ Himself when I say, "**I forgive you all of your sins.**" When the guilt of sin persecutes you and frightens you, you can rely on the words I say, not because I say them, but because of the words of today's Gospel. In today's Gospel, the risen saviour, Jesus Christ Himself said, "**If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven ...**"

Sadly, there is a flip side to this authority. When a person is guilty of manifest, public sin and refuses to repent, when the pure word of God convicts someone of an open, obvious sin, but he or she refuses to repent, our Lord's words are clear: "**if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld.**" The judgment of the church as exercised through the called and ordained servant of the Word is the judgment of God. There is no forgiveness of sins until the sinner repents.

Therefore, it's a terrible, terrible thing if anyone will not hear God's Word. Because it's through God's word that the Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin and drives us to repentance. It's through God's Word that the Holy Spirit creates and establishes the faith that receives the salvation Jesus earned for us with His death on the cross. It's through God's Word that He showers us with His blessings. How wonderful it is that we can hear God's Word as it's read, and experience God's Word as it's combined with the elements of the water, bread, and wine of the sacraments.

One of the disciples was missing out on all the blessings Jesus gave to His church that evening. Perhaps Thomas had legitimate reasons for not being there, the Bible doesn't say. It simply makes it very clear that he wasn't with the gathering on that particular night. Unfortunately, from this Thomas will always be known as **"Doubting Thomas."** This isn't really fair though the other disciples didn't believe the reports of Jesus' resurrection either, until they saw Him with their own eyes, but Thomas, because he was absent, gets saddled with the doubting reputation.

When Jesus appeared to His church the next week, He didn't single out Thomas and say, **"Sorry mate, you weren't here last week. I gave out all the blessings then. You're out of luck."** No, instead He invited Thomas to investigate His wounds: **"Bring your finger over here and touch the nail scar in my hand. Bring your hand over here and put it in my side. Do not be unbelieving but believe."**

This shows us how much Jesus loves us how kind and patient He is with us. Jesus searches out His lost sheep and gently restores their faith. In our weak humanity, we cannot believe, but God sends the Holy Spirit to us to establish and strengthen our faith. It's by the power of God and God alone that we can join Thomas and confess Jesus as our Lord and our God." It's by the power of the Holy Spirit that we can pass that confession on to others and so continue the mission that the risen Lord gave to His church. **Amen.**

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

### **Prayer of the Church Second Sunday of Easter**

P Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

*Brief Silence.*

P Everlasting Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, You sent Your Son into the world to suffer, die, and rise again for our salvation, and He sends His ministers into the world to proclaim peace with You. Bless all pastors in Christ that they may bring Christ's living word to us, especially those of the AELC and the ULMA that, they may be diligent in their study and prayer, faithful in preaching and teaching, upright in their daily lives, and compassionate in their service. Grant to Your faithful people, the flock of Christ's redemption, that they may honour and respect the pastors You give them, and hear and receive the blessed Word and Sacraments of Christ in peace, joy, faithfulness, and thanksgiving. Lord, in Your mercy, **C hear our prayer.**

P Holy God, You love justice, and so we pray for those in authority over us, especially our prime minister, federal, state, and local governments. Those in the police, doctors, nurses, fire and ambulance and state emergency services, and our military personnel serving to aid all Your people. Instil upon them the conviction that they are Your servants to guide, protect, defend, and to promote peace and good order in our land. Lead them to act honestly and justly for the welfare of all. Lord, in Your mercy, **C Hear our prayer.**

P Risen Lord, we pray for new Pastors as well as our pastors and their families. As You have said **"The harvest is great, but the labourers are few.** Therefore we earnestly pray to You the Lord of the harvest to provide us with labourers . Continue to strengthen this congregation in the bonds of Christian love so that we may rejoice with all those who rejoice. Strengthen those that are in nursing homes, hospitals and care facilities that You would give them with unity of heart, mind and witness, that nothing may hinder the work You have called us to do.....Lord, in Your mercy. **C Hear our prayer**

P Compassionate Lord Jesus, in the days of Your earthly ministry, You healed many who suffered from various illnesses and infirmities. Give Your merciful aid to all who suffer from bodily afflictions, remembering both those who are known to us and those whose needs and ailments are known only to You. Support them in their present trials, increase their faith and trust in You, and grant them healing and health, or release from their suffering, according to Your good and gracious will. Lord, in Your mercy, **C hear our prayer.**

P Almighty God, our gracious Father in heaven, You promise to provide us with all we need in body and soul. Grant Your blessing upon the fertile earth as farmers till and plant their crops, that the soil may produce its fruits and grains abundantly. Guide those who tend farms, orchards, vineyards, and livestock that they may be faithful stewards of these gifts. Grant favourable weather that fields may be sown at the proper time, that crops may flourish, and that the expected harvest may be gathered in. Bless us, that we who enjoy these gifts may receive them with thanksgiving. Lord, in Your mercy, **C hear our prayer.**

P Gracious Lord, by Your great humility You endured the bitter pangs of the Cross and thereby won forgiveness, life, and salvation for us all: Grant us Your aid, that all false pride of life and exaltation of self may be shifted from us and that we may be filled with true humility after Your likeness, that we may be glad to receive Your gift of grace through the body and blood of Your Son, our Lord, that we may bear our crosses with patience, that we may serve our neighbour in meekness, and that we may be gently led in the way that leads to everlasting life. Lord, in Your mercy.

**C hear our prayer.**

P Into Your hands, O Lord, we entrust all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy, through Jesus Christ, Your crucified and risen Son, our gracious Lord and Saviour, who gave Himself for us that we may live in Him, and who now lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **C Amen.**