

**THE RISEN LORD JESUS COMES TO US AND SPEAKS HIS PEACE INTO OUR HEARTS SO THAT
WE MAY SPEAK THAT PEACE TO THE WORLD**
Sermon for the 2nd Sunday of Easter 2020
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 our sermon today is our Gospel from before, 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, 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. 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 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, 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 through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

I guess that it is at times like today that technology really comes to the fore. Due to social distancing laws, even though we can’t gather together, hopefully, you are watching, or at least, listening to, or reading the words of this message. God’s Word is still being preached. Thanks to technology, it is pleasing for me that our parish confirmation classes continue to meet weekly via Skype. Sure, it is not quite the same as sitting around a table together, but we can still see and interact with each other, learn together, and keep in touch.

But technology goes even further. The human voice has new power! We can talk to our devices, and they will do what we ask. You’ve probably heard of Apple’s assistant Siri, or the Google assistant that has no name, or Amazon’s assistant Alexa. Just ask them a question, and they’ll give you an answer! Or at least that’s how it is supposed to work. It’s the sort of thing that was science fiction just a few years ago. We can talk to the computer. We can dictate to our word-processing programs, we can surf the internet without touching the keyboard, and we can call up a recipe in the kitchen without dirtying the tablet screen.

God created the voice to have power. When sea lions gather in large colonies to raise their young, hundreds of pups will swim out into the water together and come back together. Once on the shore, they find their mothers by listening for the distinct sound of the mother’s voice. In time, all the young find their way back to their own mothers.

Easter is, among other things, about the power of the voice. On this Second Sunday of Easter, *the risen Lord Jesus comes to us and speaks His peace into our hearts so that we may speak that peace to the world.*

This is what we read in this morning's Gospel. After Mary and the other women told Jesus' disciples that they had seen the Lord, the disciples did not really believe. By **“that Sunday evening the doors had been locked where the disciples were, because they were afraid of the Jews.”** After what the Jewish leaders had done to Jesus, and with Jesus' body missing, they worried that those same Jews would turn against them. They didn't feel safe. This is the Church at its absolute worst. It was shameful that these disciples, possibly more than just the ten (the Twelve minus Judas and Thomas) had hunkered down, huddled together, letting fear rather than faith control their every thought and action. I guess we shouldn't scold them too much – we probably would have done the same.

Suddenly, however, **Jesus came, 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. The disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

In their joy, not one of them apologises for his behaviour over the last few days. No one says he's sorry or that they should have done better. Perhaps part of the reason is they don't get a chance to say anything. Instead, it's Jesus who speaks the first word. And just as was the case at the sound of the Lord's voice in creation, the sound of Jesus' voice creates something wonderful and new: **“Peace be with you!”** He says. This was much more than a casual wish. He brought them the peace that the world could not give,¹ the peace that would sustain them through all earthly troubles.² It is His gift to them. **“Peace be with you!”** He says, and there is peace and joy.

*This, the disciples could only begin to realise, was the whole point of what Jesus had just been through. Jesus' death on the cross was to re-establish the peace between God and man that had been shattered when we first sinned. Sin will always stand as separation, conflict, between two parties. In sin, we live for ourselves, not for the other. In sin, we cannot be in harmony, our will gladly yielded to the other. In sin, we could never be with God, because His holiness cannot be in relationship with unholiness. Left all to ourselves, we would be lost. What needed to be done to save us? Paul would later write to the Corinthian Church that *“God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them”* (2 Corinthians 5:19). The two parties, God and all of humanity, needed reconciling. It is evident that the problem of sin had been caused by only one of the two parties. To the Romans, Paul wrote, *“while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son”* (5:10). We were enemies. God was and always has been love. If a change in relationship were to occur, God would have to take the initiative. This is exactly what happened: God *“reconciled the world to Himself.”* He took it upon Himself to change our status from enemies to friends. How did he do it? *“in Christ.”* By taking our sin to the cross, Christ has removed the separation and reconciled us to God, bringing us back into peace with Him, and, being pleased with the work of His Son, God raised Him from the dead.³*

The whole scene repeats a week later when Thomas, at last, is with the disciples. The doors are still locked, but Jesus comes again. He speaks the same Word. **“Peace be with you!”** Then Jesus encourages Thomas to touch and see the wounds. **“Put your finger here and look at My hands! Take your hand and put it into My side! Stop your unbelief and believe!”**

Even though two thousand years have passed since that first Easter evening, the church still struggles to get out from behind locked doors and into the world. While we may not fear suffering the same cruelty as Jesus suffered on the cross - the fear that kept the first apostles locked up - there is as much to be wary of in the twenty-first century as there was in the first century. We see the greater portion of the media wanting to discredit Christianity at any opportunity they get. Living in an increasingly secularised world, we receive some funny looks and smirks from people when we oppose such things as abortion, same-sex marriage, cohabitation, and so on. It is difficult to let the light of Christ shine in this world.

Even in our own midst, we must admit to our own challenges as our congregations age and even decline in number. There are so many forces outside the church that pull God's people away from regularly gathering around Word and Sacrament. One fear that I have when the social distancing rules are lifted and we are able to worship together again, is that, in the meantime, we have become so lax and used to staying home on a Sunday, that we don't care to gather again. I am sure though that this will not be the case. Nevertheless, there are many things that bring fear to God's

¹ John 14:27

² John 16:33

³ 1 Thessalonians 1:10

people today, and the temptation is to focus all our attention on our fear and then let that fear paralyse us. This text from John 20 is not about how the world locks its doors to the Gospel, but how the Church locks itself away from the world. The irony of the disciples' locked doors is that they weren't really keeping out soldiers looking to crucify them and they weren't keeping out friends and relatives who may have wanted to ridicule them for following Jesus; there is no record of either of those things happening. ***The One they were locking out was Jesus.*** They locked out the Word He had so clearly spoken to them about dying and rising again, and in locking out that Word, they locked out Jesus. When fear becomes our focus, we fall into the same trap; we lock out the Lord, who time and again tells His Church, **“Do not be afraid!”**

Jesus will have none of it! The securely locked doors are no problem for Him. If the grave could not keep Him in the ground, their padlocks would not keep Him outside the room where the disciples were gathered. So it was that **“although the doors had been locked, Jesus came, stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!”**” Jesus comes and stands among them and among us and speaks His Word - a word that brings the very thing it says: **“Peace be with you!”**

This is Jesus' word to you. *“Have peace, for all your sins are forgiven!” “Do not fear the world. I have overcome the world. Peace be with you.”* That Word comes to you and me today, with exactly the same power as it had come to those first disciples on the first Easter and to Thomas a week later. John summarised the contents of his gospel by saying, **“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.”** In His Word, Jesus comes among us today, and we experience the power of His voice. He doesn't just tell us about peace, but He actually speaks peace to you and me so that believing, we may have eternal life. As Luther puts it, *“As soon as He said it, it was done”* (Luther's Works, American Edition, 12:32).

Jesus has spoken His peace to you in the water of your Baptism, where you were joined to His death and resurrection and you died to sin and rose to new life. That peace is spoken to you every time you return in repentance to your Baptism, and He says to you through your pastor, *“I forgive you all your sins.”* That peace is spoken to you at His table, where in, with, and under bread and wine, He comes through space and time to feed you His body and blood in the Lord's Supper for the forgiveness of your sins and to lift from you your fears. There His voice speaks peace. *“This is for you,”* He says, *“for the forgiveness of sin,”* and we rise from the table at peace, ready to go into the world.

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.”** Jesus commissioned His disciples to carry this message of peace to the whole world.

“As the Father has sent Me, I also am sending you.” On that Sunday evening, by giving the Holy Spirit, Jesus was equipping the disciples for the ongoing work assigned to them, including especially the exercise of the Office of the Keys. The disciples were given the authority to forgive sins and to administer the sacraments publicly in the local congregation. They were to be “shepherds,” “elders,” “overseers,” “pastors.” Jesus Christ established the pastoral office, where working through this office, through called men, the resurrected Christ would now offer mankind the free forgiveness to a world drowning in sin. The gift of the Spirit as here made by Jesus was to enable the disciples to exercise the right, authority, and power with which He now clothes them in their sending.

Christ offers free forgiveness of sins today through Word and Sacrament, and that is why He has established His Church. No doubt we do live in a world today that is far from peaceful, a world that sorely needs the peace of Jesus. As redeemed children of God, we have a powerful message that can bring peace to troubled consciences, a message that should not see us hiding behind closed doors, but one that should see us flinging them open. Jesus, the resurrected Lord, has made it possible for all to have true peace. Every single one of us has a mouth that can be used to tell people of the Saviour and His redeeming work, and invite people into God's house to hear the wonderful message of redemption gained for all by Christ's death and resurrection. After all, there is no doubt that mankind desperately needs this Gospel. All are sinners who fall short of the glory of God⁴ – all are sinners who need Christ to speak His absolution to us. We need His precious forgiveness - not just a reminder that once upon a time we were forgiven. We

⁴ Romans 3:23

need Him to give us the Word of forgiveness over and over - His real, powerful, faith-sustaining Word. We need to be nourished by His body and blood, given for us.

This is the mission of the Church. The Church is not dead or dying, hidden behind closed doors, but alive, and God wants its members who have been quickened by the Spirit to let the world know that peace is possible for them - peace with God; peace in man's own soul because he knows he has full forgiveness; peace in man's soul because he knows the future has been made safe for him.

Long before there was a Siri, Alexa, or Google, there was the risen Lord Jesus, speaking to and through people like you and me, so that all who are locked behind doors of fear, sin, sickness, and even death itself may hear His word: **"Peace be with you!"**

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.

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

PRAYER FOR THE SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

God of all grace, mercy, and peace, we praise You that, by raising Jesus from the dead, You have shown that He is Your Son, and our Saviour. We praise You also that our faith stands on the fulfilment of the prophecies about Him in the Old Testament Scriptures, and on the sure record of the apostles as eyewitnesses of the risen Lord. Give us also the witness of Your Spirit that we may firmly believe Your saving truth.

We thank You for the precious gift of eternal life in Your Son. Protect us from the deceptions of the world about us, and enable us to hold firmly to the faith we profess. Deliver us from doubt and despair. Prevent us from being deceived by worthless human wisdom. Fill us with the Spirit of truth and the mind of Christ.

We thank You for Your holy Word. Give us the earnest desire to grow in Your saving truth during our pilgrimage on this earth. Though we see our risen Lord only with the eyes of faith, teach us to love Him, and to rejoice in Him. Keep us in His love that we may at the last receive the goal of our faith, the salvation of our souls, and take part in the restoration of all things and the refreshment that it will bring.

Bless Your Church, that it may speak out the Gospel of our risen Saviour faithfully, and with courage and zeal. Be with us as we continue to worship you in our own homes, longing for the day when we shall be allowed to meet again face to face.

Watch over all institutions of learning, that they may produce young people who desire to follow You, serve You, and carry out Your good and gracious will.

Hear the prayers of all who need Your special help and favour. Assure them that You continue to be merciful. When, in Your deep wisdom, You permit any of us to suffer illness or other distress, comfort us, and assure us that You will not allow us to be tested beyond what we are able to bear. Strengthen us to endure hardship to Your glory and to our own spiritual blessing. Be with those who are working to come up with a vaccine to defeat the COVID19 virus.

Strengthen the doubting and the faithless. Bring back the forgetful and the straying, and give us Your peace as we go about our daily lives. All this we pray in the name of Jesus, our risen Lord. Amen.

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 5:29-42

²⁹ Peter and the other apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. ³⁰ The God of our fathers has raised Jesus, whom you had murdered by hanging Him on a tree. ³¹ God has exalted Him to His right hand as Prince and Saviour, to give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. ³² We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him."

³³ When they heard this, they were infuriated and wanted to put them to death. ³⁴ However, a certain man in the council, a Pharisee by the name of Gamaliel, a teacher of the Law, who was respected by all the

people, stood up and ordered them to put the men outside for a little while. ³⁵ He told them, "Men of Israel, be careful what you intend to do with these men! ³⁶ For Theudas appeared some time ago, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was put to death, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. ³⁷ After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and drew a host after him in a revolt. He also perished, and all who followed him were scattered. ³⁸ In the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and dismiss them! For, if this purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail, ³⁹ but, if it is from God, you will not be able to

overthrow them. Perhaps you will even be found to be fighting against God.”

⁴⁰ He persuaded them. Then they called the apostles in, flogged them, ordered them not to speak using the name of Jesus and let them go. ⁴¹ The apostles went away from the council, rejoicing that they had been thought worthy of being dishonoured for the sake of the Name. ⁴² Every day, in the Temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and telling the Good News that Jesus is the Christ.

1 Peter 1:3-9

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! He has given us new birth by His great mercy, through raising Jesus Christ from the dead. Therefore, we have a living hope, ⁴ which waits for an inheritance that cannot be destroyed or defiled and never fades away and which God has reserved for you in heaven. ⁵ You are protected by God’s power through faith, until you come to the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In this you greatly rejoice, even though now, for a little while, if it is necessary, you have been suffering grief in various trials. ⁷ These sufferings have come that your faith may be proved genuine. It is more precious than gold, which perishes, although it is tested by fire. Then the tested genuineness of your faith will result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸ Although you have not seen Him, you love Him. You do not see Him now but believe in Him and rejoice with unspeakable and glorious joy, ⁹ because you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls. ¹⁰ The prophets, who wrote beforehand about the grace that was to come to you, searched for and inquired carefully about this salvation. ¹¹ They were trying to find out what Person or what time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when He was bearing witness in advance about the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. ¹² It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you in these things, which have now been reported to you through those who have been telling you the Good News by the Holy Spirit, who has been sent from

heaven. These are things at which angels desire to gain a clear glance.

John 20:19-31

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