

Easter 2 4/24/22
John 20:19-31 C

JESUS CAME AND STOOD AMONG THEM AND SAID TO THEM, “PEACE BE WITH YOU”

It is Easter evening. And the disciples are in a house and the doors are locked. They are locked up tight for fear of the Jews. And that makes perfect sense, at least to our human reason.

The disciples had seen what they did to Jesus. They know that from the very start of His ministry, the Jews were dead set against Jesus. The Jewish leaders saw Jesus as a threat to their position and power, and they just wanted to be rid of Him, even if that meant killing Him. So, they plot, and plan, and scheme and they put it all into action to just kill Jesus. They even convince one of His own disciples to betray Him for 30 silver coins. When He was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, they came with their swords and clubs, arrested Jesus and took Him off to stand trial before the Sanhedrin. With false witnesses, the Sanhedrin convicted Him on the false charge of blasphemy. And they mock Him and spit upon Him.

And they took Him to Pontius Pilate and He is charged with rebellion against Caesar. Again, Jesus is convicted of that. And once again, He is mocked and spit upon. He was stripped naked and flogged by the soldiers until their arms had no strength left and the flesh on his back hung in strips. Then, they dressed Him and marched Him out to Golgotha. There, they drove iron spikes into His hand and feet, nailing Him to the wood of the cross. On that cross, He died an agonizing and excruciating death. To make sure He was dead, they shoved a spear into His side.

The disciples had seen all that and they're thinking, "We're next". If that's what they did to Jesus, what are they going to do to us? After all,

they had heard Jesus' words, "A disciple is not above His teacher, nor a servant above His master" (Mt 10:24). And, they saw what they did to their Teacher and Master. And now, what are they going to do to us?

So, there they are behind locked doors, pondering the horror of what they did to Jesus. Look around you in the world today and, really, it's not all that difficult to ponder and to think about you.

This year, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod celebrates her 175th Anniversary. We stand firmly on the Holy Bible being the only source and norm of the Christian faith. On the day of your confirmation, you were asked, "Do you confess the doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, drawn from the Scriptures, as you learned to know it from the Small Catechism, to be faithful and true? That means that when the Psalmist says, "For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb" (Ps 139:13); we believe it, even when the world around cries that gender is a choice. That means when Jesus our Lord says, "Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female... Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'?", we believe marriage is between a man and a woman. Period. In the same way, when Christ says, "This is my body, which is given for you... This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood (Lk 22:19-20), we believe it's just that – His very body and blood in, with, and under the bread and wine, given to us to eat and drink for the forgiveness of sins. And we also believe that Bible when it says, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the up, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes," so we commune only at those altars where we are in doctrinal agreement (1 Co 11:26).

Ok, we're not in Afghanistan, North Korea, or Iran, so we are not going to be jailed and killed for our confession. But, this world in all of its perversity is always trying to squeeze us into its mold. It happens. It happens right here in our little town. Christians are made fun of, mocked and ridiculed, rejected for our beliefs on things like gender, marriage, Communion, women in pastoral office, and a whole host of things. You know the sneer; the cruel sarcasm in the words, "Oh, you go to that church."

Oh, and you know what? Read the Bible, where Jesus says it's only going to get a whole lot worse. Persecution, and I mean physical persecution, will only become more and more common place until the day Jesus comes again in glory.

So, maybe it's not such a bad idea to just stay locked in behind locked doors. That way, no one can get in. Well, almost no one. Jesus, risen from the dead, shows up. Remember, the disciples had said the same thing you said the day of your confirmation, "I will suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from your confession of Jesus Christ." Look how that turned out. They showed up with clubs and swords to arrest Jesus, and they fell away from Jesus as fast as their little feet would go. And Peter, who really made a big production of boasting that even if all the others fell away, he would not fall away, ended up denying Jesus three times.

You now how that is. The pressures on. You know the embarrassment and the shame of being made fun of, mocked and ridiculed, and rejected. And if that weren't enough, you have the day-to-day struggle with the devil, the world, and your sinful flesh. With these unholy three leading us into temptation, false belief, despair, and shame

and vice, it is so easy in our thoughts, words, and deeds, in the things we do and the things we don't do, to fall away from Jesus.

And now, Jesus, risen from the dead, shows up. And you just know the disciples are thinking, "Oh no, we denied Him, we ran away from Him. What is He going to say to us? What is He going to do to us?" And Jesus opens His mouth and says, "Peace be with you." "Peace be with you." There's no accusation, no vengeance, no anger, no condemnation or damnation. There's just peace. And these words mean that they say. It is well with you soul. All is forgiven. Peace with me and with the Father.

The GOOD NEWS for you, Dear Child of God, Jesus speaks the same words to you here, in God's House. Here, Jesus says to you, "Peace be with you." And the same thing happens here as it did in that house that first Easter evening. There's no anger, or accusation, or condemnation or damnation because you fell away from Jesus in sin, there's just peace. And these words mean what they say. It is well with your soul. All is forgiven. You have peace with God.

You really do have what those words say – you really do have peace with God. If the devil and the weakness of your sinful flesh lead you to doubt and despair, to doubt that it is true, I invite you to look at your Savior's hands and His side. His hands with those nail holes in them are the same ones that gathered up the disciples' sin, and your sin, and the sin of all the world and carried them to the cross of Calvary. Christ's blood was shed all over that cross to pay the ransom price to buy you back from sin, death, and the devil.

Look at His side, where He was pierced by the spear. When His side was pierced, out flowed blood and water, flowing into the very places where Jesus comes to you to bring you peace. That water flowed into the font of

baptism, where Jesus washes away your sin. That blood flowed into the chalice, so that when you come to the Lord's Table, He feeds you with His life-giving body and blood. St. John writes that the water, the blood, and the Spirit testify that Jesus Christ lived, and died, and rose again for you and for your salvation. Because He did, you have peace with God.

With sins forgiven, peace with God, we don't stay locked doors in our fears. The disciples didn't. They went forth in the power of the Holy Spirit to Jerusalem, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

My Dear Friends in Christ, we go forth in the power of the Holy Spirit. You have peace, joy, and comfort in Jesus because someone told you about Jesus. So it is we comfort others with that same comfort we have in Jesus, so that they will know sweet it is to have fellowship with Jesus.

Yes, we know there will be opposition and persecution. But, we also know we have the words of Jesus, "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven" (Mt 5:11-12).