

Easter 2 4/16/23
John 20:19-31 A

ON THE EVENING OF THAT DAY, THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK, THE DOORS BEING LOCKED WHERE THE DISCIPLES WERE FOR FEAR OF THE JEWS, JESUS CAME AND STOOD AMONG THEM AND SAID TO THEM, "PEACE BE WITH YOU!"

What are you afraid of? I mean afraid, shaking like a scared little rabbit in your boots afraid? Snakes? Heights? The dentist? How about the # 1 fear of everyone's list – giving a public speech?

The disciples were afraid. It's evening of the first Easter, and the Evangelist tells us they are shaking in their boots, like scared little rabbits. They are cowering in fear behind locked doors. They are not afraid of snakes, heights, the dentist, or giving a speech. They are afraid they are going to be killed like Jesus was.

If we look at the situation according to our human reason and **not** walk by faith, it makes sense that they would be locked in behind closed doors in fear. On Thursday, the mob came to Gethsemane, arrested Jesus and dragged Him before the Council. The council charged Him with blasphemy, convicted Him on that charge, and sentenced Him to death. Then, they marched Him off to Pontius Pilate and charged Him with being in rebellion against Caesar and cried that He should be crucified. And despite the fact that Pilate could find no basis for the charge against Him, he had Him crucified. And now, they are wondering: if they did that to our Lord and Teacher, what will they do to us?

And yet, you have to stop and ask: Why are they afraid? They had heard the reports of the women. Peter and John had been to the tomb and saw that it was empty. Maybe, they're afraid because Jesus is not with them. Where is He? What's He doing? Why isn't He here with us? Or,

worse, what would He say to us, if He came and knocked on the door?

Here they are, all these thoughts swirling around in their heads. The Evangelist doesn't tell us, but we can imagine what they've got to be thinking, can't we?

Look at John, the disciple Jesus loved. His mind is probably going like this, "I saw Jesus die. And right before He died, He entrusted His mother to me. My job is to take care of her. But, if I'm arrested for being one of Jesus' followers, what is going to happen to Mary?"

We could turn our gaze to Peter. He's probably thinking, "As we sat at the Passover table, Jesus said, 'They will strike the shepherd and they will all fall away.' I had boasted, 'Maybe they will, but not me, Jesus. I'm going with you – prison, death, I've got your back.'" Jesus had looked at him and said, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." Peter again blew his own horn, "Oh no, those other guys might deny you, but not me, Jesus." Hours later, Peter heard that rooster crow.

And then there's Thomas. He's not with the others when Jesus came. Maybe he's stepped out to get some fresh air, or a pizza, we don't know; we just know he's not there. This absent one is perhaps thinking, "Gee whiz. When we went to Bethany and Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, we knew His enemies were out to get Him. I stood up and bragged, 'Let's go with Him and die with Him.'" But the Garden of Gethsemane is as far as Thomas went, and he ran and hid.

And, all the rest have got to be thinking the same thing. When the going got tough, they got going – away from Jesus and they ran and hid, as they we're hiding right now.

What are you afraid of? Even though Christ is risen and our greatest enemy death has lost its sting, the disciples were hiding in fear. You know

all about fear, don't you? You know what it's like to walk by fear, and not faith.

As little children we are afraid of monsters under the bed or in the closet, but as we get older our fears become much more real. Our teenage years are spent wondering "What do people think of me;" fearing that bully you have to see every day in class. You go to college and fear: what am I going to do with my life? What if I don't get a job that I've spent these years studying to get? You get married, a new baby is born, and you hear those dreaded words, "something is wrong with your child". Now, in the golden years, what do I do if my health fails me? Will I still be able to provide care at home for my spouse who is in failing health?

Sadly, in this world broken by sin, we know fear all too well. And we wonder what's going? What's going to happen to me? And above all, we wonder: Where is Jesus? Does He even care?

Well, My Dear Friends in Christ, we don't have to be guided by our worst fears, because Jesus did show up. The Evangelist tells us, "On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you' (Jn 20:19)." And He also said this, "Where two or three are gathered in My name, there am I among them (Mt 18:20)." And as we gather together in God's House, together, Jesus is here to say to you what He said to the fear-filled disciples on that evening of the first Easter, "Peace be with you!"

Surprising, isn't it? In your confirmation vows, you vowed to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from the Lord Jesus Christ. But, you didn't. You haven't. You sinned against Him. When He shows up, He doesn't wag his accusing finger at you; He doesn't beat you over the head

with what you've done – or what you have not done. He says, "Peace be with you."

We have to understand those words. These are not words of simple greeting. This is absolution. This is sins forgiven. That is, Jesus telling you all is forgiven. Jesus can say that to you because of what happened to Him, because what happened to Him was for you.

They took Him to the place of the skull, Golgotha. And there, they crucified Him. For six hours, He hung there, enduring God's wrath and punishment against sin, for you, in your place, even dying the death you deserved. Once He was dead, a Roman soldier shoved a spear into His side. Then His lifeless body was taken from the cross and placed in the tomb. Three days later, He came forth from that tomb to bring you the forgiveness of sins He won for you.

And He does that by His Word, "Peace be with you." He shows them His hands and side, the very wounds by which He won for them the peace of God and the forgiveness of their sins.

Thomas, the Evangelist tells us, was not with the disciples when Jesus appeared to them. Instead of believing the words of his fellow disciples, he doubted and remained in his fears.

Our Lord Jesus didn't want Thomas to remain in doubt and fear, so He came to Him. Our Lord Christ does not want you to walk by doubt or remain in your fear, so He comes to you just as He did Thomas and the ten.

And that's why He's here to meet with you this morning and say to you, "Peace be with you," giving you the forgiveness of sins He won for you. And what a difference that peace makes in life – the disciples, Thomas, and yours, Dear Child of God. The disciples did not stay behind

locked doors in fear. Look at the words of our reading from Acts. Even when the ruling council, the same council that sentenced Jesus to death, charged them not to tell anyone about Jesus, they went out and boldly proclaimed Christ even unto death. The forgiveness that Jesus gives, gives faith, so that we can walk by faith in the darkness of this present age, telling everyone of the hope that we have in Jesus, even in these uncertain times.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! And He is with us and He comes to us....to give us peace, that peace which the world cannot give to us and that peace that surpasses all human understanding.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.