

John 20:19-31

¹⁹ On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

²¹ Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” ²² And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

²⁴ Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”

²⁶ A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.” ²⁸ Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!” ²⁹ Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

³⁰ Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹ But these are written that you may believe^[b] that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Dear people in God’s Kingdom

I don’t know about you, but for me, this is always a tough week of the year. There was that big build-up to Easter, but that’s all past us now. Didn’t you get a different feeling when you walked in today in contrast to last Sunday? We had a full church last week for all the services, with that wonderful feeling that you get from a full church, and this week is usually much different, back to normal, with the regular number of people here, or maybe even a few less. Maybe that’s why this week is tough for pastors, because so much work and energy and time went into planning and writing and leading all the services last week, and then we have to get something ready to go for the next week. See, it’s real easy to have kind of a big letdown the week after Easter.

But today we want to remind ourselves that there never needs to be a letdown. The same message we heard last week, we will hear again today. We are going to hear about that same wonderful word: peace. That’s really what Easter is all about. So now that all of the busyness of Easter is behind us, let’s take another look at that peace as Jesus very powerfully encourages us all to;

Theme: Believe In The Peace Of Easter!

- 1. Peace in sins forgiven**
- 2. Peace that brings true joy**

It was just a couple weeks ago that Wisconsin was on high alert for the man accused of robbing the gun shop in Janesville and then writing that he might harm people, even churches and schools. For this reason our school buildings and many others were on a “soft” lockdown which meant that the doors were locked at all times and that the kids couldn’t go outside for recess during the day to keep them safe. It was a different feeling for all of us to think that we actually have to stay inside behind locked doors out of fear what this one man might do.

This got me to thinking about what it must have been like for Jesus’ disciples who were on a “lock down” of sorts that first Easter Day. As we see them in this text, the disciples were a pretty fearful group that first Easter evening as they were locked in a room and were afraid for their lives. They knew what their own leaders had done to Jesus, and they feared that they might be next. They had heard reports about Jesus’ body being gone, but they had also probably begun to hear that the soldiers who were supposed to be guarding the tomb were saying that the disciples had come and stolen the body. That would probably make them even more marked men. They had to jump a little bit at every noise they heard, wondering if it as someone at the door come to get them. And then add to that, that fear wasn’t the only thing they were feeling at the time.

I’m sure there was grief over the death of Jesus. And I bet that there was a lot of confusion because they had heard reports that Jesus was alive again, but they weren’t sure what to believe. They had been told by people who had seen Jesus that they were to go to Galilee, but here they were locked in a room in Jerusalem. And on top of this grief and confusion, I’m sure there was the guilt. Each of these men had sworn to be loyal to Jesus, to die rather than turn away from him. And at the first sign of trouble, when they came to arrest Jesus, they took off running. And Peter, their alleged leader, did even worse. He actually swore that he didn’t even know who Jesus was, denied him to anybody that would listen. Besides the disciples locked in that room, the air must have been thick with fear, sorrow, doubt and regret.

Against that background, the words that Jesus speaks are even more amazing. Sometimes to help us try to get a handle on Jesus’ love for us, we can try to imagine how we would write the story. What would you say if you came into that room that night? “What are you guys doing here? I told you to go to Galilee.” “I told you that you would desert me. Didn’t I tell you? But no, you wouldn’t believe me. You’d never leave me. Where were you when I was going through all of that? Thanks for your help.” “If you’re really sorry, you won’t do it again.” “I told you that I had to die but I would rise again. Why don’t you listen?”

But we don’t hear any of that from Jesus, do we? What does he say? **“Peace be with you.”** Sure, that was a pretty standard greeting in those days, but that night, in that room, peace was in short supply. What Jesus was essentially saying was, “You have no more reason to be afraid, have peace.” “Put aside your sorrow and your doubts, and have peace.” And most importantly, “Put your regret and guilt behind you, and have peace.” And then he showed them exactly why they could have peace. He held out his hands, and showed them the marks of the nails. They could have peace only because they had forgiveness. And because Jesus had won for them forgiveness, they could be free of fear and doubt and regret and guilt, and be at peace.

What are you afraid of? Over and over again polls show the same group of common fears: spiders and other creepy-crawlies, heights, death, and usually at the top of the list is public speaking. But what are

your fears? Are any of those fears hindering you from following Jesus? Are you afraid to let people know that you're a Christian, because you fear how they might treat you? Are you afraid to put others ahead of yourself, because you don't everybody to step on you? Are you afraid to give your offering to God first, before you pay all your bills, because you fear that you might run out? Do you have any regrets? Anything in your past that you just can't get over, that you wish you hadn't done, or that you wish you could stop doing? With all of those fears and doubts and regrets, how could we ever have peace? There's only one way. It can only come through Jesus, and it can only come through forgiveness. Jesus paid for all of those sins. Every regret that we have, Jesus has washed off our record books, so that God doesn't remember them anymore. All of our fears, Jesus has done away with. All of our doubts, he has answered with his never-failing promises. That's the peace that we can have today, peace that we can have forever.

When we go back to that locked room in Jerusalem, we see that Jesus did something that might be even more amazing. Too often, I think that we're too slow to forgive. But even when we do forgive, it's even harder to forget. We'll say things like "I forgive you, but I don't think I can trust you again." Could any of us have blamed Jesus if he did that? "OK guys, I forgive you, but it might be a while before I can count on you again." But that's not what we see at all, is it? Jesus not only forgave them, but he also commissioned them. They were the ones that he would use to do his important work. Jesus had done the work of saving the world, but it would fall to his disciples to tell the world of what Jesus had done for them. They would fill the world with his teachings, with the peace that he had won. Jesus taught them that the peace of Easter was a peace for them to keep, and a peace for them to share.

Do you know anybody that could use some peace? Maybe things have been tough for them lately, and they're frustrated because their life seems to be spiraling out of control. Maybe they're burdened with guilt over things in their past. Maybe there's some unresolved tension between the two of you. Today, just as Jesus called and commissioned his disciples, Jesus is calling you. You are his ambassadors. Jesus has done the unthinkable, by not only forgiving our sins, and giving us the peace of forgiveness, but then actually using us. He doesn't put us on some probationary period, and say, "I might trust you if you can keep your nose clean for a while."

He has called each of us, and uses us to get his message, his peace, out into a world that desperately needs peace. So think of the people in your lives who need peace, and think of how Jesus can use you to bring them that peace. If you need to forgive them, or ask their forgiveness, then go do it. Think of the mountain of sins that Jesus has forgiven you, and let that motivate you to forgive the molehill of sins that someone else has committed against you. Let the peace of Easter fill you, and then let it overflow, so that you begin to spread that peace to the people you come in contact with.

So maybe this week is tougher than most weeks. Maybe we don't have quite the same number of people we did on Easter. Maybe spring isn't coming quite as fast as we'd like. Maybe Easter came and went a little too fast this year, but we have something that lasts far longer than the chocolate bunnies or Easter candy. We have the peace of Easter. We have the forgiveness of Jesus, won for us on the cross. That forgiveness removes our doubts, calms our fears and erases our guilt. Even after the candy is gone, believe in the peace of Easter, a peace for you to keep, and a peace for you to share. Amen