

4-16-22

2nd Sunday of Easter

Text: John 20:19-23 Pastor Priewe

Theme: Peace. Proof. Forgiveness. Power

In the name of the Risen Lord Jesus, whose blood set us free to be the people of God. Can you imagine what a locked room full of disciples would have sounded like over the course of days since Jesus had been killed? What could be heard in a room with a dozen or more guilty, fearful sinners in it, couped up and huddled around, with perhaps nothing better to fixate on or bicker about than their individual and collective betrayals of Jesus? If I know anything about how easy it is for me to recall guilt from any point in my life, I've got to think that each of those disciples would have had some pretty haunting guilt on their mind.

Remember some of the bold promises we heard from the disciples? The first thing recorded from mouth of the disciple Thomas in the Bible was his valiant plea to the other disciples, **“Let also go, that we may die with him.” (John 11:16)**. Now, at this point, Thomas isn't even with them in the lock room. Remember how Jesus had warned all of them that they would all scatter when the going got rough. And what did Peter say, **“Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.” And all the other disciples said the same.” (Matthew 26:35)**. They had all made big promises to Jesus and quickly broke those promises, and now Jesus was dead, and for them, there was no changing it. All of that is before you even mention what they were to think about the Judas, their friend, their companion, one of the Twelve, who had directly betrayed Jesus to his death, and then went out and took his own life. Did they blame him? Did they blame themselves for not seeing it?

All of those events put together are enough to put anyone into a post-traumatic daze. It's no wonder why on the third day, they were all troubled and downcast, doubtful and disbelieving of all the reports they had heard about the tomb being empty and Jesus being alive. The initial reports of the resurrection only added to their gloomy plight since now they'd likely be on the hook for stealing the body of Jesus and the next on the list for the Jews to get rid of. It sounds to me like that locked room, at least before the fuller reports of the resurrection, would have just about been bursting from the inside out with turmoil and doubt and guilt and helplessness. You know what days like that feel like, don't you?

Four days before, Jesus had promised those disciples something that they had not comprehended in the least over the last few days—peace. **“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” (John 14:27)**. Then Jesus had been arrested, beaten, and crucified; the disciples had run, denied and scattered. Now four days later from that initial conversation about peace, can

you guess what the first words off Jesus' lips were to a room struggling against the pangs of unbelief? **“Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!”** (John 20:19).

That was often the way people greeted each other, but this was no ordinary “small-talk” greeting. Often, the way people think of peace in earthly terms is to picture the absence of conflict or turmoil or war, but the way the Bible describes peace is to talk about the presence of something better. The Hebrew Word for peace—*Shalom*—pictured the concept of wholeness or completeness that exists even when there's a number of complex pieces or circumstances that could be out of whack.<sup>1</sup> *Shalom* peace pictures everything being in order and everything fitting together the way it's supposed to be.

But everything in the disciples' experience since Jesus first promised them peace has been the opposite of that—turmoil, doubt, guilt, helplessness, disbelief. That's what sin has done to the way things are supposed to be, it has come and dropped a bomb into everything and blown in it into a million pieces so that nothing is the way it's supposed to be and this world feels like it has no peace. So people hurt and betray each other and people don't feel like they belong in the group and people don't feel like they belong even in their own bodies. In the middle of it all, we carry around our guilt and shame and then we try to self-medicate those wounds with any number of things, like food or alcohol, or Tik-tok followers, or secret addictions, or with people we've gathered around us who will simply tell us that we are fine the way we are. That's the way to end up locked inside a room with all of our turmoil and doubt and guilt and helplessness, where nothing is the way it's supposed to be and it doesn't feel like Jesus has risen from the dead.

Do you know who the only one who can set a room like that in order is, the only one who can bring completeness and restoration to the brokenness we experience in our hearts? The only, and I mean only one, who can do it is the one who appeared in that locked room and said **“Peace be with you!”** Peace! Not like the stuff the world gives, but the *peace of God* which surpasses all our understanding. Do you know why he is the only one who can offer true peace? Because he is the only one who has taken our punishment on himself and was stricken and afflicted for it! The Bible says, **“The punishment that brought us peace was on him.”** (Isaiah 53:5).

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<sup>1</sup> Bible Project Video. *Shalom/Peace*. <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/shalom-peace/>

And do you know what the very next thing Jesus did after he spoke his greeting of peace? He showed them the proof! He showed them his hands and side. The proof of that peace was not in the pudding, it was in the nail marks and the spear hole in his resurrected body. Jesus was proving not only that he was the same one who had been crucified for them and had now risen, he was also showing them the very wounds that had brought them forgiveness and peace. Peace can only come when the disarray of sin has been restored to order and the proof of that was in the wounds on his glorified body! **“By his wounds we are healed!”** (53:5).

Everything restored! Everything in order! Peace that flows from the forgiveness of sins. That’s the kind of peace that you can search the world over and will never find except from Jesus the Prince of Peace, who was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life because he had set everything right for us before our Father in heaven. So Jesus finishes giving them this wonderful “peace sandwich” on Easter; first peace, then the proof, then a second time, **“Peace be with you!”**

“But!” You might ask, “How does this peace get to me? How can I know that it’s mine, especially when my life looks to be in such turmoil? Jesus gives them the way to communicate true peace to believers down through the centuries when he says, **“As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.’ With that he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”** (John 20:22,23).

In his first gathering with the disciples together, Jesus commissions his sprouting Church of believers on their mission forever. Forgive sins, and also, don’t forgive sins. There’s a time to do both. But make no mistake, this whole thing, this whole world is about sin and grace and the forgiveness of sins, and not just the theoretical concept of it, but the communication of it, the application of it to each other. Do you realize what Jesus is giving you? Along with the forgiveness and peace that comes from his resurrection, he is also giving you the **power** of the Holy Spirit and authority to do something that’s generally been reserved for God alone—you can forgive sins.

That’s an amazing privilege and a big responsibility. It’s called the ministry of the keys—the binding key and the loosing key. It gets those name from when Jesus also told the disciples, **“I give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”** If you’re going to use

that authority, you have to know when to bind or loose, when to forgive or when to refuse it, when to free people from their sins or when to lock those sins up on their hands like handcuffs.

Well, that seems kind of mean! When would you ever do that—bind someone’s sins to them, and lock them up? Doesn’t Jesus say to forgive everybody all the time? In your own heart, “yes!” so that you don’t hold any sinful grudges. But should you always proclaim to sinners that they are forgiven? No!. There’s a time to not forgive their sins. When they don’t care what they’ve done, when they know what God says about what they are doing and it doesn’t matter to them, that’s the time to bind. When they’ve made it clear by their attitude and actions that they want keep the sins they’ve been committing and keep on committing them, that’s the time to lock up those sins and bind them on their wrists and lock the door to heaven until they realize that they won’t get through the door of heaven dragging their sin in. Hell is the place for those who want to deliberately hold on to their sins even after Jesus has taken them away, and telling them that ahead of time is the loving thing to do. The goal of the binding key is to turn the impenitent sinner to repentance.

On the other hand, when someone comes to you, knowing the guilt of the sin they’ve committed and they’re broken by it. They recognize their offense against God and their neighbor, and they confess their sins, loathing what they’ve done and longing to live a new life. You get to stand in the place of Jesus and speak a word of peace on his behalf. You get to utter the most beautiful words a guilty soul has ever heard. “Your sins are forgiven for Jesus’s sake. By His wounds you are healed. And you get to take their sin and their guilt along with it and throw it all into the depths of the sea knowing that Jesus stands behind your words with his powerful words from Easter Sunday, **“If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven.” (John 20:23)**

In the midst of turmoil and doubt, guilt and helplessness, the Risen Lord Jesus comes to his disciples on that first Easter evening to grant them gifts only he can give: Peace. Proof. Forgiveness. And Power. By his command, believers have passed on those gifts so that today we too can have them for ourselves. Christian, you have Peace. Proof. Forgiveness. And Power, all from the Risen Lord Jesus. Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all our understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.