

## John 20:19-31

There were no doors in the Garden of Eden. No locks, no keys. If there had been, you can be sure that Adam and Eve, after they sinned, would have locked themselves in, in order to hide from God. Like the disciples on Easter evening, our first parents were terrified, not of the Jews of course, but because of what they had done. But as Jesus appeared to His disciples, so God came to Adam and Eve, not, however, to condemn them, but to forgive them; to tell them of the One who would die for their sin, of Him who would bear in His hands, and feet, and side, the scars which proclaim peace. And on that Easter evening, as the disciples were huddled together in fear, Jesus came and before they could even cry out, He said to them, "Peace be with you," and showed them His hands and His side.

And so today, I want you to know, you who have huddled together here in this house, that whatever your fears--guilt over what you have done, fear of being condemned, fear of death, fear of what others think of you, of what God thinks of you--the word you will hear from me, who has been called to speak on Christ's behalf, is the word of peace. You will hear the word of Law today, for God commands His ministers to preach repentance. But above all, as our first parents were comforted by God in the Garden, as the disciples were comforted by Jesus behind locked doors, so will you be given words of comfort today...because where Christ is, and He is here with you and for you, there is the word of peace, the word of forgiveness.

It was a sorry sight, pitiful, those people in hiding...afraid, worthless, guilty, ashamed. Am I speaking of Adam and Eve or of the disciples on Easter evening? Take your pick. They are both the same picture. Adam and Eve did the one thing God told them not to do. They gave in. They were weak. They failed. The disciples had all abandoned Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Later, Peter denied Him. They all forsook Him. They gave in. They were weak. They failed. And now their lives were a mess.

What would our first parents do? They didn't know. They had no plan except to hide from God. They were ashamed so they sewed fig leaves into clothing. They were afraid now of the animals. Bears, and tigers, and lions were not pets anymore. They saw only death in their future. Jesus' disciples had no plan either, except to hide. Their world had caved in around them. They were ashamed of their actions. They were afraid of their neighbors. Their hopes had vanished. They were told by some women that Jesus was alive, but the news did not take hold of them. They lived in the shadow of death.

Your life, in some ways, may be similar to this picture, because we also give in to temptation, we are weak, we fail. Not just every once in a great while; pretty much daily. We do the things God tells us not to do. We avoid doing the right thing when the wrong thing is more attractive to us. Like those disciples, we forsake God by our actions. Like Adam and Eve, we blame others for our failures. And we hide. We hide from responsibility. We hide from the truth of our sinful actions. We hide from God. But it does not work. Eventually our sins find us. We feel guilty. We deal with issues of anger, of despair, of loneliness. We need help. We need to be found by God's mercy.

When God finds sinners like us, there is nothing in our life which can stop Him from forgiving us. To Adam and Eve, in the midst of their fear and shame, God told them He would send a Savior. To the disciples on Easter evening that Savior appeared. Weak and shameful though they were, He not only spoke to them of peace; He gave it to them. God was at peace with them. They had a Savior from sin. Death had been defeated. Satan had been given a fatal wound by Jesus' death and resurrection.

Did that change things for them? Did it put their lives back together? Did it give them hope for the future? Change was slow at first. They had doubts. Their fears hung with them. A week later they were back behind locked doors. But again those doors could not stop Jesus. Again He appeared to them. Again He gave them peace. Again He forgave them. Over time those eleven men were turned around. Over time their fears gave way to courage. Over time they lived, no longer in the shadow of death, but in the hope of eternal life. Not because these men finally got it together. Not because they found strength within themselves. But because whenever they huddled together--and they huddled Sunday, after Sunday, after Sunday even unto death--Christ huddled with them. He was the answer to their fears. He was pardon for their sins. He was relief for their guilt.

Friend, and I call all of you friends, there is nothing in your past which you need to be afraid of. The word of peace Jesus spoke to His disciples is for you this day. The marks of the nails in His hands and feet are displayed here for you in His Word and Sacraments. God is at peace with you no matter who you are. You need not be afraid of Him no matter how you have lived. You need not fear His judgment and condemnation. Jesus died for you. The scars are there. It happened. He died and He lives, not for His own sake; for yours. And because Christ died and lives for you, will that not make a difference in how you live?

When God came to Adam and Eve, He did not say, "I will send a Savior but only if you shape up and live right." When Jesus the Savior appeared to His disciples, He did not tell them, "God can be at peace with you if you first do something for Him." And so today...do not think that forgiveness is yours only if you start living a better life. Dear fellow sinner, you are forgiven, period. There are no strings attached. God is merciful for Jesus' sake. He forgives every sin of yours. God is at peace in His heart toward you, not because you love Him, but because Christ bore your sins in His body. You can leave here today and go out and sin worse than you ever have, and God will still be at peace toward you; for Jesus' sake He would still declare you forgiven. But why would you want to? Why would anyone who knows the love of God, who lives in His forgiveness, want to throw it all away and live as if Jesus did not matter?...as if Jesus' death and resurrection made no difference in their life?

And so now, Trevon and Austin, God's forgiven ones, baptized into Christ, about to confess Him in the presence of us all and before God, how do you desire to live as confirmed Christians? Learn from Jesus' disciples after Easter. They were weak, sinful, scared. They had much to learn. Above all they needed Jesus. And that's why you would always find them huddled together where Jesus came to be with them and for them.

We, with you, are Jesus' disciples today, and like them we are weak and sinful, and we deal with fears and doubts. But in Christ you will overcome. In Christ the victory is yours. In Christ heaven belongs to you and no one can take it away from you. How do you desire to live? I pray that, by the grace of God, you live as people of the Word. Live in Christ. Live in His love and forgiveness. And keep huddling, because whenever you huddle here...sins, fears, weaknesses, and all...Jesus huddles with you. Amen.