

## John 20:19-31

It appears that the disciples of Jesus were suffering from some type of phobia. It might have been agoraphobia - the fear of being out in public. Verse 19 tells us that they had some type of Judeophobia - the fear of the Jews. But the reason they locked themselves in might have been because of a phobia even deeper than these...Theophobia - the fear of God. They had abandoned Him in Gethsemane. They had not stood by Him in His darkest hour. Peter had gone so far as to deny Him, the very thing he had sworn he would never do.

It was now Easter, late in the evening. They had heard reports from the women and the Emmaus disciples that Jesus was alive. Yet, rather than running through the streets of Jerusalem as heralds of the resurrection, they were huddled together in fear. And then Jesus appeared. He did not bust down the door. He did not come in through a window. He appeared in the midst of them because the Risen Christ is no longer limited by walls, doors, and locks. Were the disciples relieved? Not yet. This is the same Jesus they had abandoned and denied; the same Jesus they surely had disappointed; the same Jesus they would have been afraid of. But it did not take long for their fear to go away and for them to be filled with gladness. Jesus did not bark at them. No scolding. No anger. *"Peace be with you,"* He said, and then He showed them His hands and His side.

You were witnesses to an event identical to this. It took place this morning with the baptism of Quinn Olivia Weirich. She came in here today and she was behind locked doors. Satan had locked her in. She was bound in sin and death. This is how we are born into this world. God's Word is clear. We are conceived in sin and are under the power and dominion of the devil. And we cannot escape. No phobia keeps us locked away. It's a power greater than us...the power of sin, death, and Satan.

But as the Risen Christ appeared to His disciples, so He has come here to be in the midst of us. As He has promised, He was in the water of Holy Baptism as it was poured out over Quinn. He did not come to accuse her, to frighten her, or any such thing. His words to her were identical to the words He spoke to His disciples...*"Peace be with you."* Jesus gave Quinn peace with God by forgiving her sins.

When Jesus came to His disciples, forgave them, and assured them, this was the very thing they were needing the most. And for Quinn, too, as a baby she has many needs. But Jesus, today, gave her in the waters of baptism what she needs the most--a place in God's family, the forgiveness of her sins, freedom from the power of the devil, and life, the risen life in Christ.

When someone is locked in, they are cut off from others. We all are born locked out of heaven and cut off from our loving God. What a blessing, therefore, baptism is for us! It unites us to our Lord. It unlocks heaven's door to us by giving us Jesus, who is the Way, the Door into heaven.

Now when Jesus came to His disciples, He came in Sacramental form. He came both for their ears and for their eyes. They heard His words, *"Peace be with you,"* and they saw in His hands and side the marks made by the nails and the spear. This is how Jesus still comes to us today. He comes through His Sacraments which are both for our ears and our eyes. He came to Quinn, her pastor putting Jesus' words into her ears, *"I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."* But His words were joined to water, water which we can see with our eyes. This is how Jesus comes to you here at His altar. His word comes into your ears, *"This is My body...My blood...for you."* And you see with your eyes the bread and wine placed into your mouth through which He comes to you.

Jesus does not come to us in any other way. He comes through His Word into our ears, and He comes through His Sacraments which we both hear and see. He did not, on that Easter evening, come in a different way to Thomas. Thomas was not in church that day. He missed the Easter service in which the Risen Christ came to His disciples. This is why Thomas walked in unbelief. *"I will not believe,"* he told the others. Of course not. Apart from God's Word and Sacraments, through which the Risen Jesus comes to us, no one can believe. But God was merciful to Thomas. He was in church the following Sunday, and again Jesus came to His disciples. Again He gave them peace. Again they were forgiven and strengthened by the Sacramental presence of the Lord. And now Thomas exclaimed, *"My Lord and my God!"*

Do you see the pattern here for us? On Sunday, and on Sunday again, Jesus' disciples came together, not strong and courageous, not free from guilt and fear--they met together in weakness; they met as sinners who had offended their God. But Jesus did not fail to come to them. He was not out with the people in the streets of Jerusalem. He was not out at the shopping mall. He came to where His disciples had gathered. And there the Risen Christ forgave them, nourished them, and strengthened them.

This is why Jesus' disciples have not failed to meet together on Sundays for 2,000 years. The pattern we see in our text continues today, and will continue until the Day of Judgment. Jesus keeps coming to His disciples because it is, He is, what we need the most. Just look around you this morning, and look also at yourself. Peter is here, and James, and John. So is Thomas who used to walk in unbelief, but he, too, now gathers with all the others. And the women are here also, with the children. We are here because we are Jesus' disciples. And this means that we are weak in faith, full of fear, and doubt, and guilt. We, like the disciples on Easter evening, meet here fully aware that we have offended our God. You have let Him down. I have let Him down. You have abandoned Him, as have I, to follow instead our own interests in life. What comes before God in your life? Work? Leisure? Rest? Family? We have forsaken the Risen Lord, who gave up all He had for us, and we have put things less important ahead of Him.

Do not fear. Jesus is here, but He is not here out of anger. He is here to give you peace. He died for you, and He rose again for you. Your God is at peace with you. He forgives you. For all your offenses against Him and your neighbor, against your family and loved ones, God forgives you. Just as He forgave Quinn in Holy Baptism, not because she earned it, but purely out of mercy for Jesus' sake, so also God, in mercy, forgives you.

So go out and live the risen life as His disciples. Do not reject His forgiveness by going back into a life of sin. As Christ left the power of sin, death, and hell behind Him as He rose from the tomb, so can you because the Risen Christ lives in you. And next Sunday, when those who are Jesus' true disciples meet again, we will meet once again with guilt, and fear, and doubts. But Jesus will not fail you. He will come again for you because He is what you need the most. Amen. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!