

## John 20:19-31

Last week it was evident that Jesus lives as Christians packed into church buildings to hail His resurrection. Today it is quite clear that Satan is alive and well as those very same church buildings sit half-empty. But it should not strike us as unusual that Easter can make such a shallow impression on people. Even Jesus' disciples went back into hiding a week after Easter; a week after having rejoiced at seeing the Risen Lord!

We can understand, though not agree with, but understand the fact that they were hiding behind locked doors on Easter evening. They were scared. Their enemies had just arrested and crucified their Lord. They heard the women announce that He was alive, but their doubts and fears were greater than their faith. But then Jesus appeared to them. "*Peace be with you,*" were His words to them. He showed them the scars in His body to prove it was truly He. And so why were these same ten men, plus Thomas, back behind locked doors a few days later?

I suppose we could also ask why the last seven days for us were everything but what they should have been. We were filled with Easter joy last Sunday. Then why did we speak with angry words to our neighbor last week? We met the Risen Lord here in His Sacrament last Sunday. Then why did we turn around and slap His face by choosing to live selfishly last week? Do we believe that our Savior lives or not? If we do, then why do we so often, including the last seven days, live as though He does not? That's how the disciples were acting...as if Jesus was still in the grave, or at least as though Jesus' resurrection did not really make that much of a difference in how they lived.

And since we're asking all these questions, here is one more which really has me stumped. When Jesus appeared to His disciples the second time, why didn't He scold them for not living as if He was alive?. Instead, He says the very same words to them, "*Peace be with you.*" Perhaps it would have been better here for Him to have said, "Shame on you!" The same words He should be saying to us today. But, just like in our text, Jesus is here with us again today telling us the very same words, "*Peace be with you.*"

What's going on both here today and in our text can be explained by the following story. At a previous church where I was a pastor, our Youth Group attended a large Youth Rally one year. There were 25,000 young people there. There were big names in entertainment. And there was a lot of time in worship and Bible Study. When they came back, a man in the congregation who saw himself as a spiritual leader, but really was more of a spiritual buffoon, told our young people that now things would be different. They were really fed down there at the rally, he continued. They were part of something big. Now they would really start living their faith. The man had little regard for the weekly Sunday service, being very critical of them, but he loved and praised things such as the big rallies.

This is the exact opposite of what Jesus teaches. The big Easter Rally did not move His disciples to bigger and greater things. Instead, it was Jesus coming to them and giving them His word of peace, not once at a 25,000 person event, but Sunday after Sunday behind locked doors. And also for us. Someone who comes to church only for our big Easter service is not going to have a change of heart and life. It's the coming to all the "lesser" services Sunday after Sunday, with the pews half-empty, but where Jesus meets us with His word of peace--this is how Jesus causes His resurrection, His life for us to be at work in us.

We do not gulp down one big meal a year and then fast for the next 364 days. We eat smaller meals each and every day. And this is how we grow in Christ as well. A Christian is not someone who

comes to gulp down one big Easter service expecting to be nourished for the entire year. A Christian is someone who comes and sits down here for meal after meal, week after week, knowing that because Jesus is here for him, he will be nourished in his faith.

And so here you are. Like the disciples in our text, you are back one week later. The doors are not locked but, like them, you may be here with all kinds of fears and doubts...and most of all, like them, we are here with all our sins. The world out there does not believe this or they would be in here with us, but you do believe it--that Jesus is here right now. His presence with us is as real as it was for the disciples behind locked doors. And His words are identical. Jesus knows how you have struggled last week. He knows that we have lived selfishly. He knows how poorly we have treated our neighbor. He knows how poorly we have treated Him. He knows, therefore, that you need His word of peace. Not peace over in Syria. Not peace in the streets of St. Louis. Peace with God. Your God, against whom you have rebelled, is at peace with you. He is not angry at you. He forgives you.

Without this peace, it matters not if the whole world is at peace. Without peace with God, no one can be at peace. For if we have an angry God, a God who hates us and is intent on punishing us, nothing else matters in life. That's why the first words Jesus spoke to His disciples on Easter evening and the following week were, "*Peace be with you.*" And that's why He showed them the marks in His hands and side--to prove that He had died for them and now was alive.

And so for you...your Lord commands His pastor to speak His word of peace. "*I forgive you all your sins*" I declared to you in His name. And here in the Sacrament are the marks of the nails and the spear. Here through bread and wine Jesus shows you, as He did for His disciples, that He died for you and that now He is alive. For He gives you His flesh which hung on the cross. He gives you His blood which poured out of the holes made by the nails and the spear.

The world is in turmoil. There is violence in every place. But there can be peace right now in your heart because Jesus gives you peace. It is not what we deserve. But it is yours. God's heart is at peace with you because Jesus died and rose again for you. This peace, this forgiveness is given here not just at our big Easter service--for then none of us could be Christians. Our faith would soon fail. Our life in Christ would die. As often as we need food for our bodies, so do we need, as often, food for our souls. And as Jesus did for His disciples in our text, so He does for you. He keeps coming here to meet you, to be here for you with His word of peace. He keeps coming here to forgive your sins. He keeps coming here to give you His resurrected life.

Each and every week you and I fail Him. We live selfishly. We treat both God and our neighbor poorly. Friend, Jesus does not fail you. He will never, ever stop giving you here His word of peace. And so be at peace...at peace in your heart...at peace with your neighbor. Your God, for Jesus' sake, is at peace with you. "*Peace be with you.*" Amen.