

THE BLESSING OF PEACE
Sermon for the 2nd Sunday of Easter, 2021
John 20:19-31

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is the Gospel from before, John 20:19-31: ¹⁹ **That Sunday evening the doors had been locked where the disciples were, because they were afraid of the Jews. Then Jesus came, stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you!”**

²⁰ **After He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. The disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.**

²¹ **Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent Me, I also am sending you.”**

²² **After He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit! ²³ If you forgive any people’s sins, they have been forgiven; if you retain any people’s sins, they have been retained.”**

²⁴ **However, Thomas, one of the twelve, who was called “The Twin,” was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ The other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.”**

He told them, “Unless I see the marks of the nails in His hands and put my finger into the marks of the nails and put my hand into His side, I shall certainly not believe.”

²⁶ **A week later, His disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors had been locked, Jesus came, stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!”**

²⁷ **Next He told Thomas, “Put your finger here and look at My hands! Take your hand and put it into My side! Stop your unbelief and believe!”**

²⁸ **Thomas answered Him, “My Lord and my God!”**

²⁹ **Jesus asked him, “Have you believed because you have seen Me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed!”**

³⁰ **Jesus also performed many other miraculous signs in the presence of His disciples, which have not been written in this book. ³¹ However, these things have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that, believing, you may have life in His name.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

To have peace in the Christian Church is a big thing. Sadly, because Satan always tries to disrupt this peace, we must expect peace to be tested at times. Peace is of great value among the people of God.

Today, from our Gospel, we find Jesus choosing to speak a blessing of peace upon His disciples as the first thing He says when He appears to them the first time following His resurrection from the grave. When it all comes down to it, the content of the Gospel is *the blessing of peace*.

John writes, ¹⁹ **That Sunday evening the doors had been locked where the disciples were, because they were afraid of the Jews. Then Jesus came, stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you!”** The disciples were bunkered down because they feared they would be next on the hit list of the enemies of Jesus. By now they had undoubtedly heard about Jesus’ resurrection. Mary Magdalene had reported to them her meeting with the resurrected Jesus in the Garden, and John and Peter had run to the tomb and to see the empty place where the body had been laid. Peter and John had looked in the tomb and, seeing that the body was missing, believed but *“did not yet know the Scripture, that He had to rise from the dead”* (John 20:9). They had hopes, and yet they still had fears.

“Then Jesus came (and) stood among them.” Suddenly, He was there among them behind those locked doors as though He had just walked into the room through a doorway. He spoke, **“Peace be with you!”** ²⁰ **After He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. The disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.** The whole unbelievable thing was true! Somehow, Jesus had risen from the dead! It was outstanding news!

Then Jesus spoke again. One more time, He bid them peace, and said, **“As the Father has sent Me, I also am sending you.”** That is where the word “Apostle” comes from. It means “Sent Ones.” Jesus commissioned them right then and there. He charged them with a mission. What was that mission? Listen to the words of John - and Jesus as quoted by John, ²² **After He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit! ²³ If**

you forgive any people's sins, they have been forgiven; if you retain any people's sins, they have been retained."

The mission of the Apostles was to forgive and retain sins. They were to distribute what Jesus had purchased with His death and resurrection. *Their commission was to forgive sins*. The authority they received that day has been passed on to the Church. It is the authority of the Office of the Keys, exercised by the pastor publicly for the congregation in the preaching of the Gospel, in the pronouncing of absolution, and in the administration of the Sacraments. Its use does not depend on the worthiness of the man, but on the power of God, and the authority of the Word, and on the work of the Holy Spirit.

The words of Jesus are spoken when the pastor says, "*on behalf of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*" It is in this first moment of the Christian Church, as Jesus commissions His Apostles and gives them both the scope of their mission and His authority to perform it, that the power and efficacy of the absolution we hear is established. These words are meant to speak peace and comfort to our hearts as well because the pastor also says, "*peace be with you.*"

"²⁴ However, Thomas, one of the twelve, who was called "The Twin," was not with them when Jesus came." Maybe this was no coincidence. Perhaps Thomas was absent that day by the design of God for our sakes. Naturally, the disciples couldn't help but share the good news! "*We have seen the Lord! He is risen from the dead!*" Just like any one of us, Thomas was just a *wee bit* sceptical. "**He told them, "Unless I see the marks of the nails in His hands and put my finger into the marks of the nails and put my hand into His side, I shall certainly not believe."**

Why is it possible for us to think that Thomas was absent for our sakes? Because he asked the question that any reasonable person would, just as if we were confronted by the extraordinary claim that someone had risen from the dead! Thomas was not about to take their word for something so unbelievable as that. He had to see for himself - and for us, as it turns out.

Thank God for old doubting Thomas! The next Sunday, Jesus appeared to His Apostles again. This time, Thomas was there. "**Although the doors had been locked, Jesus came, stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"** He wanted Thomas to see it just like the others had. "**He told Thomas, "Put your finger here and look at My hands! Take your hand and put it into My side! Stop your unbelief and believe!"** There was no sense of scolding here. It was *our* invitation to see for ourselves - through the eyes of Thomas. He was invited to put his fingers (and ours) into the nail holes and see that they were real. Then he was asked to stick his hand into the wound made by the spear and be sure it was real and that the man he was seeing was physically there. This wasn't just "seeing" with his eyes - eyes can play tricks on you. This was seeing with his eyes and his touch and his ears!

Thomas was overwhelmed! "**My Lord and my God!**" There were no words of profanity or an overstatement by a man who had just been shocked by seeing what he could not even imagine was true when he was told about it. This was a confession of faith. Jesus is Lord and God - proven by His rising from the dead.

Then Jesus said something remarkable! He said, "**Have you believed because you have seen Me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed!**" Those words refer to us. They tell us also that Jesus doesn't intend to go around "proving it" to everyone. Thomas was our test case. Jesus is also telling us that Thomas is to be our eyes into this event. Thomas did not believe a story - nor did any of the other disciples. They believed *what they saw*, and what they saw transformed them from men huddling in fear to Apostles boldly going out to proclaim, and to forgive sins, even in the face of the threat of death. We are blessed when we see through the eyes of Thomas and believe what caused this doubting man to become a humble confessor.

John then tells us that his book does not tell us everything about Jesus or what He did, but it tells us what it does so that we, too, may believe. He writes, "³⁰ **Jesus also performed many other miraculous signs in the presence of His disciples, which have not been written in this book.** ³¹ **However, these things have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that, believing, you may have life in His name.**"

By believing, we have life eternal in the name of Jesus Christ. It is by faith that we possess what Christ has won for us. Trusting in the promises of God that what Jesus has done has now taken sin out of the equation, all that God has promised - forgiveness, life everlasting, and salvation - is ours because of and in connection with Jesus Christ. We receive it all.

When we stop to consider the staggering price paid for us and the overwhelming gift of God, we come to understand the peace which Christ offers and gives to each of His people. It is the peace of sins forgiven. There is no longer any need to carry guilt around. From our Second Reading for today, John wrote, "*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and*

just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). When we confess our sins, sins we wilfully commit (sins of commission), good deeds we fail to do (sins of omission), and the sinful nature of every person, God is faithful to forgive us for Jesus' sake. We don't have to doubt. There is no reason to ask what we must do to earn it or deserve it. Doubting Thomas took care of that for us by examining the evidence. It was real. Jesus died and rose again. All that He has promised is certain and sure.

And He promises to take our sins and our guilt and remove it. He promises that those who trust in Him for this forgiveness will also possess life eternal and resurrection of the body to that eternal life of both body and soul on the last day of the world. All we need is faith - and faith comes by hearing the Word of God.¹ Like Thomas, we need to examine the evidence, and hear the promises of God, and let the Holy Spirit have time to work in us through the Word.

Because of the greatness of the promises, we should be *eager* to learn more clearly and completely what is promised and what our God is like. We should be excited to give the Holy Spirit access to us by the Word - and the Sacraments. Every Christian has this eagerness, for it is a work of the Spirit, too. Some resist it, not understanding it, or feeling the pressures of the flesh and of this world more acutely than they feel the urgings of the Spirit. That is why the Apostle Peter wrote, "*Like new-born babies, long for the pure milk of the Word, that by it you may grow up to salvation!*" (1 Peter 2:2)² We are those new-born babies. We are born of water and the Word unto everlasting life. We are kept by the power of God for salvation, and not our own. We are fed by the Lord's Supper for faith and salvation and immortality. We are strengthened and built up by the Holy Spirit through the hearing of the Word of God. However long the Lord allows us to grace this earth is nothing in the face of eternity, so we all remain but "new-born babies."

So, let us pay close attention to Thomas the Twin and see in him the test of the evidence. It really happened: Jesus rose from the tomb, which means that it will also happen for us. It means that even when we have no sense or feeling of it, our sins have been forgiven. It means that God loves us, and He counts each one of us as though we were His only-begotten Son, so our lives are never out of control - just out of *our* control, at times. God is with us every day, blessing, and guiding, forgiving and loving, and bringing us to the things He would have us to do for Him.

Knowing that is comforting and trusting in that with all your heart³ is *peace*. It is the peace of knowing we are secure. It is the peace of knowing God will not let us go. It is the peace of sins forgiven. And it is the peace of the child who knows that his or her Father is there, so nothing can go wrong. It is the peace of faith in Jesus Christ, and all that He has done, and all that He has won - in short, the Gospel, the Good News of our salvation. It is a peace which begins when we can confess with Thomas, "**My Lord and my God!**"

"Peace be with you!" Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

Lord God, heavenly Father, mighty in power and majesty, the creator and preserver of all things to the very limits of space, we, Your children, come before You with our thanks and praise, and ask You in mercy to hear the prayers we offer.

We thank You that You have glorified Your Son Jesus by raising Him from the dead. Give us the blessings of that limitless grace that He has won for us on the cross.

We praise You that You have transformed the sadness of all Jesus' disciples into the joy of the resurrection. Help us to grasp Christ's promise of eternal life, believe it with joy, and rely on it with confidence. Fill us with the assurance that one day our eyes also will see Him, when finally He receives us and all believers into the kingdom prepared since You made the world.

Make the empty tomb the source of inspiration and power to Your Church. Fill all believers with a genuine desire to glorify Your name and do Your will, that people everywhere may be turned from their sin to faith in their risen Lord. As we witness to the risen Lord, give us a sense of solidarity with the apostles of Jesus, the courage that they had, the

¹ Romans 10:17

² The Second Sunday of Easter is also known as *Quasimodo Geniti*, Latin for "just like a new-born baby." This verse is the one from which this Sunday of the Church Year draws its name.

³ Proverbs 3:5

determination to witness to Jesus' resurrection, and the message of repentance and forgiveness that goes with it, give us opportunities to speak it forth, and give our words Your blessing.

Bless our country with Your continuing favour. Give us a government that maintains liberty, upholds justice, curbs lawlessness, and uses its authority with courage and high principle. Move all Christian citizens to accept their lawful obligations and duties cheerfully, giving respect to those in authority, and honour to all people.

Grant that we may live as people who are only pilgrims on earth. Give us the power and grace we need to resist evil, and fight the good fight of faith, until we finally receive the crown of life.

Give comfort to those among us who are sick, sorrowful, and distressed. Free us from all fear of death and the unknown. Fill us with patience in every test and trouble. Send Your Spirit to make us joyful and thankful Christians. We ask these things in the glorious hope of eternal life with You, in the name, and for the sake, of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 4:32-35

³² The large number of believers was one in heart and soul, and no one said that any of his possessions was his own, but they possessed everything in common. ³³ With great power the apostles continued to give testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great good will rested on them all.

³⁴ For there was no one among them who was in need. For all who possessed pieces of land or houses used to sell them, bring the proceeds of the things that were sold ³⁵ and lay them at the apostles' feet. These used to be distributed to each one according to the need he had.

1 John 1:1-2:2

¹ That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched, concerning the Word of Life – ² and the Life has been revealed; and we have seen It, testify to It and proclaim to you the eternal Life that was with the Father and that has been revealed to us. ³ What we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, that you also may have fellowship with us. Our fellowship is also with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. ⁴ We are writing these things that our joy may be complete.

⁵ This is the message that we have heard from Him and that we are telling you: that God is Light and in Him there is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in darkness, we are lying and not practising the truth.

⁷ However, if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, cleanses us from all sin. ⁸ If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all un-righteousness. ¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned, we are making Him a liar, and His Word is not in us.

^{2:1} My little children, I am writing this to you that you may not sin. If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ² He is the propitiation for our sins and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

John 20:19-31

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