

**WORDS OF LIFE**  
**Sermon for the Second Sunday of Easter 2022**  
**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 our Gospel Reading read before, John 20:19-31: **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!”**

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

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

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

<sup>24</sup> **However, Thomas, one of the twelve, who was called “The Twin,” was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> 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.”**

<sup>26</sup> **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!”**

<sup>27</sup> **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!”**

<sup>28</sup> **Thomas answered Him, “My Lord and my God!”**

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

<sup>30</sup> **Jesus also performed many other miraculous signs in the presence of His disciples, which have not been written in this book. <sup>31</sup> 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,

Imagine sitting on death row, waiting for your sentence to be carried out when suddenly you receive a message of pardon and release. This message comes as words of life in a world of fear and death.

“Words of Life.” That’s what we hear in all three readings today: the First Reading from Acts; the Second Reading from Revelation; and the Holy Gospel from John. Words of life, to people sitting in prison, overcoming their fear and giving them the faith and the boldness and the final victory that they need, and the good news is, these words of life come not only to the people in our readings, they also come to us.

Today and for the next five Sundays, that is, for the rest of the Easter season, our readings will come from these three places - Acts, Revelation, and the Gospel of John. Throughout, we shall hear the glorious and life-giving message of Christ’s resurrection and what that means for us. It starts today, and the common thread running through these lessons today is that in each one, the words of life come to those who are locked up sitting in prison.

In the reading from the Gospel of John, those disciples are not literally locked up in an actual prison, but they may well have been – they were in a prison of their own making. John writes, **“That Sunday evening the doors had been locked where the disciples were, because they were afraid of the Jews.”** In a confused and fearful state of mind, the disciples had gathered that evening behind locked doors. After what the Jewish leaders had done to Jesus, and with Jesus’ body missing, they worried that those same Jews would turn against them. They didn’t feel safe. Jesus’ enemies had been out for blood. They had gotten their way with Him, had Him put to death. Now, the fear was, would they come looking for His followers? Thus the locked doors.

But if a mighty stone in front of a tomb could not stop Jesus, neither would these locked doors. The resurrected and glorified Lord passes right through and comes and stands among them and says, **“Peace be with you!”** Here are words of life and peace and pardon. To those who had deserted their Master in His hour of need, the gracious Christ comes with full forgiveness. **“Peace be with you!”** these words were more than an ordinary greeting; this is a *holy absolution*. Then the risen Lord shows them the cost at which that absolution had come. **“He showed them His hands and His side.”** He showed his Hands, still bearing the marks of the nails that held Him to the cross. He showed His side, still bearing the mark of the piercing spear that made sure that He was dead. Notice that Christ, even in His resurrection, still bears the marks of His crucifixion. This is how He wants to be identified. This is how He wants to be known, always as the One who was crucified for our transgressions, the Lamb who was slain, by whose blood we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

**“Peace be with you!”** Spoken by the crucified and risen Saviour, these are words of life, words of forgiveness to faithless disciples, words of reassurance to fearful disciples. Christ meets their amazement by showing them that it is really He. They do not see an apparition. They are not hallucinating. This is truly their risen Lord standing there, risen with a body they can see and touch and handle. Their fear gives way to gladness. **“The disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.”**

Again a second time, Jesus speaks His peace to them, this time empowering them for their mission as apostles, as His witnesses. He will be sending them out very soon so that they may speak His words of life and forgiveness to others. He says, **“Receive the Holy Spirit! <sup>23</sup> If you forgive any people’s sins, they have been forgiven; if you retain any people’s sins, they have been retained.”**

However, one of their company was not there that day. **Thomas, one of the twelve, who was called “The Twin,” was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> 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.”**

Thomas missed Jesus’ appearance on that Sunday evening. His turn will have to wait till a week later. Thomas did not believe their report that the Lord had risen. When **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.”**

Hearing the words was not enough for Thomas. He had to see for himself.

**“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!”**

On this night, a week after Jesus had shown Himself to the disciples, the doors are still locked. I guess fear doesn’t die that easily. But Jesus comes again, again on a Sunday, and He stands among them. By the way, Jesus has been doing that same thing every Sunday for 2000 years now, coming among us and speaking His words of life. This time Jesus comes for the *special benefit* of Thomas so that he would not miss out - so that he would not be lost in unbelief, but instead believe and be saved. Jesus **“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!”** Jesus’ words let Thomas know that He knows about his initial refusal to believe, which causes Thomas to repent of his unbelief. Now he confesses his faith in who Jesus is: **“My Lord and my God!”**

That’s good, Thomas, but the words in the first place should be enough. **“Have you believed because you have seen Me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed!”**

Now we come to us. This describes our situation. You and I - we were not there in that room, either on the first Easter Sunday or a week later, to see the risen Christ. We have not touched His hands or His side. Yet still, Christ comes to us, and He speaks His words of life to us, and - what amazement! - we believe! This is a miracle! This is a gift to which Jesus pronounces us “blessed.” **“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed!”** This is you and me He is talking about! Did you know that Jesus mentions us in the Bible? He does! *It’s right there*.

So how does this happen? How come people here and all around the world, how is it that we all believe in, and take our stand on, a Man rising from the dead whom we have never seen? ***This is the power of those words of life***. These

words work. They work faith in our hearts. These are living and powerful words, active and creative words. They create the faith in the Saviour they proclaim.

This is why God has seen to it to have these words of life recorded for us in the Bible, so that we who have not seen Christ in person - we will still hear and believe and be saved. John tells us that this is his purpose in writing them down: **“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.”**

The Word of God which we hear read from the lectern and preached from the pulpit, The Word which make Holy Baptism and the Lord’s Supper the means of grace that they are - the good news of peace and pardon and life in Christ, this Gospel Word brings and bestows the gifts it speaks of, as well as giving us the ability to receive those gifts. This is saving faith, created by these words. **“these things have been written”** - and read and preached and given to you so **“that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that, believing, you may have life in His name.”**

These are words of life to people in prison: This is the theme running through our lessons today. In the reading from Acts, this time the apostles are literally locked up in an actual prison. However, locked doors cannot stop God from getting His Word to people. The apostles need to hear it themselves, and so do the people they will reach upon their release. So God is going to give the apostles the boldness they need to persevere in the face of persecution. He’s going to get them out of that prison cell, so they can go out and do the job He has for them to do. During the night, an angel of the Lord opens the prison doors and brings them out, saying, *“Go and stand in the Temple and keep on telling the people the full message about this life!”* (Acts 5:20), which they do, with great boldness.

God’s words of life free us from our fear of speaking out and confessing Christ. *“If God is for us, who can be against us?”* (Romans 8:31). What can man do to us? Our life is secure in Christ. Threats and persecution cannot shut us up. Yes, they can shut us in prison, but they cannot shut us up. This is a word of encouragement for the church today, living as we do in a world of increasing hostility to the Christian faith. God’s words of life free us from our fears and give us boldness and courage to live and speak as Christians.

Think of our Second Reading from Revelation. The aged apostle John is not in a prison made of iron bars, but he still is in a prison of sorts. He has been exiled to the isle of Patmos, a little piece of rock off the coast of Asia Minor. It was their version of Alcatraz. John is there, old and isolated and cut off from the church he loves. But now Christ comes, appearing to John on - guess what, a Sunday, by this time called “the Lord’s Day,” since Christ rose on the first day of the week, and that is when the church gathers. The risen Lord Jesus comes to John on the Lord’s Day, glorious and brilliant and arrayed in dazzling splendour. John is fearful and falls down at the majesty and might of the Messiah in His glory. But Jesus comes to John and says, **“Stop being afraid! I am the First and the Last, and the One Who Lives; and I died, and look! I am alive for ever and ever and I have the keys of death and of Hades”** (Revelation 1:17-18).

Words of life once again! Words to free us from our fears and give us hope to carry on, whatever our age or adversity. Jesus has died for our salvation, for our forgiveness. All our sins have been paid for, in full, by the precious blood of Christ! There is no condemnation for us. God is pleased with us on account of His Son, so much so that He has raised Him from the dead. Christ died for our sins and has been raised for our justification.<sup>1</sup> Jesus is the living One. *“I died, and look! I am alive for ever and ever and I have the keys of death and of Hades.”* Those doors that would want to lock us in forever, those prison doors of death and hell - by now, we know that locked doors cannot keep Jesus out. Christ owns the keys to death and Hades. He is their Master. He is their Lord. Jesus had gained title to those places when He overcame Satan by His death on the cross. The devil has been defeated. Death has been defeated. The gates of hell shall not prevail. The final victory has been won by our living Lord, and He gives us a share in His victory through His words of life.

So we have nothing to fear. Death has been stripped of its power. Life - new life and eternal salvation, this is what Christ is giving us now on this Lord’s Day and throughout this Easter season and on into eternity. The words of life will do their job. We have life forever with Christ, our risen Saviour. Amen.

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

<sup>1</sup> Romans 4:25

**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 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 5:12-32

<sup>12</sup> Many miraculous signs and wonders were performed among the people by the apostles. All the brethren used to be in unanimity in Solomon's Porch. <sup>13</sup> None of the others dared to join with them but regarded them highly. <sup>14</sup> Many believers were increasingly being added to the Lord, both men and women. <sup>15</sup> As a result, people even carried the sick out into the streets and laid them down on beds and mats, so that, when Peter came, at least his shadow might fall on one of them. <sup>16</sup> Many people used to gather even from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those whom unclean spirits troubled, and they were all healed.

<sup>17</sup> Then the High Priest and all those who were with him, who were members of the local party of the Sadducees, began to be filled with envy. <sup>18</sup> They arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison. <sup>19</sup> However, at night the angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out. He said, <sup>20</sup> "Go and stand in the Temple and keep on telling the people the full message about this life!"

<sup>21</sup> After they heard that, they went into the Temple at daybreak and began to teach. The High Priest and those who were with him came and called together the Jewish council, all the elders of the people of Israel. Then they sent some men to the prison to have the apostles brought. <sup>22</sup> However, when the officers arrived, they did not find them in prison. They came back and reported, <sup>23</sup> "We found the prison very securely locked and the guards standing at the doors, but, when we opened them, we found no one inside."

<sup>24</sup> When the captain of the Temple and the High Priests heard these reports, they were puzzled about them, wondering what might come of this. <sup>25</sup> Then someone arrived and told them, "Look! The men whom you put in the prison are standing in the Temple and teaching the people."

<sup>26</sup> Then the captain went with his officers and brought the apostles but without using force, because they were afraid that the people would stone them. <sup>27</sup> They brought them and made them stand before the Jewish Council, and the High Priest questioned them <sup>28</sup> and said, "Did we not give you strict orders not to teach using this name? Yet here you have filled Jerusalem

with your teaching and you want to bring this Man's blood on us."

<sup>29</sup> Peter and the other apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. <sup>30</sup> The God of our fathers has raised Jesus, whom you had murdered by hanging Him on a tree. <sup>31</sup> God has exalted Him to His right hand as Prince and Saviour, to give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. <sup>32</sup> We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him."

Revelation 1:4-18

<sup>4</sup> John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from the One Who Is and the One Who Was and the One Who Is Coming and from the Seven Spirits who are before His throne, <sup>5</sup> and from Jesus Christ, the faithful Witness, the First-born from the dead and the Ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood <sup>6</sup> and has made us a kingdom, priests to God and His Father — to Him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

<sup>7</sup> Look! He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even the men who pierced Him, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen.

<sup>8</sup> "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, the One Who Is and the One Who Was and the One Who Is Coming, the Almighty.

<sup>9</sup> I, John, your fellow-Christian and companion with you in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patience in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus. <sup>10</sup> I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day and heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, <sup>11</sup> saying: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea!"

<sup>12</sup> Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me. When I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, <sup>13</sup> and among the lampstands Someone like the Son of Man. He was clothed with a robe that reached down to His feet and wore a golden belt around His chest. <sup>14</sup> His head and His hair were white like wool, white like snow, and His eyes were like a flame of fire. <sup>15</sup> His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. <sup>16</sup> In His right hand He was holding seven stars. Out of His mouth came a sharp, double-edged sword, and His face was like the sun when it shines in its strength.

<sup>17</sup> When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. He laid His right hand on me, saying: "Stop being afraid! I am the First and the Last, <sup>18</sup> and the One Who Lives; and I died, and look! I am alive for ever and ever and I have the keys of death and of Hades."

John 20:19-31

<sup>19</sup> 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!"

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