

2nd Sunday of Easter

Text(John 20: 19-23) Subject (What Did The Risen Christ Bring His Church?) Theme (1. Divine peace. 2. The Office of the Keys.)

The disciples were upset; terribly saddened by the (apparent) loss of their Master and deeply disappointed in what seemed to be, at best, *untruths* regarding the Messianic claims of their dear friend, Jesus. So they hid on Easter evening behind closed doors. Our text for this morning says, “**Then, the same day (Easter Sunday) at evening, being the first day of the week (Sunday), when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews**”....

Before we voice our shock or displeasure with the disciples, let us examine our *own* hearts. Have we, ourselves, experienced trials or tribulations that have brought us to the same mindset of the apostles in that locked room? Can we remember ever wondering if the Bible is “really true”, or outright doubting that it is? Perhaps it was accompanied by fear.....fear, even, of not being forgiven. The vast majority on this earth live in that fear. But divine forgiveness brings peace. Knowing beyond all doubt that all of our transgressions are washed away brings a peace that only God can give. It is unexplainable....but a tremendous source of joy.....

As we speak, brethren, the world is living under a burden; the burden of sin. It needs forgiveness and (true, everlasting) peace. We know that blessed forgiveness and our Savior’s peace. It has been bestowed on us through the Gospel but we also need to be ready to share it with others! Divine peace, brought by the Office of the Keys, is what the risen Christ brought His Church.

In our text the disciple had *heard* that Jesus was not in the tomb but most did *not* believe it. The Jewish leaders had led the Roman government to kill their Master and now, as a result, the disciples cowered in fear behind closed doors. It seems that they had *forgotten* when Jesus had walked on the water, calming the winds and the sea. It seems that they had either lost their faith or were

greatly weakened in it. They were frightened of being hurt, jailed or being crucified...like their Lord....

Fear of the world, fear of death or fearing the Devil flow from a dead soul or from the *sinful nature*. How many times have we been afraid of dying or fearful of what unbelievers would do to us if we actually *acted* like Christians? Perhaps we even shake at the thought of seeing the Devil! We too easily forget that we should “fear, love and trust in God above all thing.” Like the Jews of our text, we find ourselves afraid when we should *trust* and the result is turmoil in our hearts, souls and families.

Jesus, however, came to bring peace. In His love and mercy, there is *no* fear. Our text says, “**Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, “Peace be with you.”** He did not, at that point, leave! No, He showed them the reason for that peace; His nail-printed hands and the side that took the Roman spear. Our text says, “**Now when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.**” You see, when fear of anything but God tries to invade us, let us remember that the reason He spoke to us was to give us peace. When we hear the words of the Gospel, we are given a peace “which passes all understanding”. As we understand that Jesus lived, died and rose again on Easter morning for us and for our salvation, a peace from Heaven *flows* into our hearts.

The unbelieving world, of course, tries to *substitute* its own peace for the divine peace of Jesus. Others try to tell us that we can find peace by *abusing* alcohol, money, drugs, sex or by worshipping other gods. Still others try to find peace before the true God by being “good” or *not* being bad. All of these efforts are in *vain*. Only in the blood and the in the empty Tomb of Jesus can we find real, divine peace. That is why He says in chapter **14** of Saint John, “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you; *not* as the world gives.” Jesus shows us the reason for deeper and deeper peace as he makes known to us His grace and love in His Word; the Bible. As our parents, pastor, Sunday School teachers and friends point out to us God’s love in Christ, His peace sweeps

in. Like the disciples of our text today, we too “rejoice” because our Savior from sin *lives!* Our names are written in Heaven and, by His grace, we know the Truth; Jesus, Who was crucified, *rose from the grave!* *No one* can take this joy from us because it was *given* to us by the Son of God Himself; in our Baptism, through the Gospel and in the Sacrament of the Altar! It is a joyous peace that most, here, have known from infancy. As the children of God we *want* to “see” Jesus (by faith). That is why we read, study and hear the Word of God preached because there, in the Good News of Christ’s death and resurrection, we are certain of everlasting life.

Is there an area in *your* life that needs *more* divine peace, brethren? Is work an overwhelming “hassle”? Do teachers or students at school upset your stomach? Is there a “civil war” going on at your home between you and your spouse? Jesus came to give you peace. It is found in the Word and Sacraments. It is ours by faith. That is why our text says, “**Then Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace to you!’**” Individual “peace” to us; personally, from God Himself. No wonder Saint Paul wrote in Romans, “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

And this “peace” is not only for us, it is for *everyone!* Our Lord says today, “**As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.**”

To establish this “peace” world-wide, the risen Christ gave His Church the Office of the Keys. What are the Office of the Keys? According to our Small Catechism, “(It) is that special power and right which Christ gave to His church on earth, to forgive the sins of penitent sinners, but to *refuse* forgiveness to the impenitent as long as they do not repent.” This is based on the very text before us today in the Gospel of John. It says, “**And when (Jesus) had said this, He breathed on them and said to them ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.**” “You mean we have the ‘right’ to hold back, or (in the Greek) “bind” someone in their sins as long as they are *not* sorry for them?” Yes! It is, unfortunately, too common today for people to say that we must

forgive *everyone*; regardless of their attitude toward their sin. This teaching comes from human reasoning. The Bible, however, clearly tells us to proclaim to those who are NOT sorry for their sins that they are still *in* their sin! Saint Matthew tells us that “Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in Heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in Heaven.” This power was given to all Christians because we are the “priesthood of all believers” (as Doctor Martin Luther put it).

Many times I have gone to people who have openly sinned and asked them to repent; to get them to say that they are sorry and turn from their sin. When the rare occasion comes up that the person says, “No way!”, I tell them what Jesus said; that they are *not* forgiven before God and that they are bound for Hell. They, then, cannot take Holy Communion or be forgiven before God until they repent and trust in Christ, alone, for forgiveness once again.

What a blessing, however, it is to tell someone that God *forgives* them. I do it from the pulpit and in Bible class. All of us can do it privately. What a tremendous comfort is it to be told that your sins are washed away. As Saint Luke says, “If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, *forgive* him.” We yearn to forgive those that are hurting spiritually. We want to forgive those who have trespassed against us. We do so because we have received the Holy Spirit from the living Savior. In the gentleness of the Good Shepherd we go to those who are crying out to have their burden of guilt released. We forgive the penitent, “in the place and by the command of our Lord Jesus Christ.”; looking for this opportunities, because He is *living* and because it is our blessed privilege, and responsibility, to do so.

Because we *personally* know the forgiveness of Christ and His peace, let us, brethren, use the Office of the Keys; the proclamation that the impenitent are not forgiven and let us forgive those whose hearts are sorrowful; embracing their souls with the grace, mercy and forgiveness of Jesus Christ, the living Lord. In His risen Name, Amen.

