

Sermon for the Second Sunday of Easter, April 12th, 2015

John 20:19-31

Blessings to you and peace from God the Father, our **risen** Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Amen

Christ is Risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia.

For those of you who were here at our **Easter** service last week you may remember that our **gospel** reading from the book of Mark ended with the women leaving Jesus' empty tomb in terror, amazement, and fear. There was no running to tell **anyone** the news of what they had found.

Also, you may remember that I mentioned how the other three gospel writers told a **different** story. They **all** told stories of women who came upon the empty tomb. They **either** hurried away, afraid—yet; filled with joy **running** to tell the disciples what they had found, or they simply went back from the tomb to tell the disciples all they had seen and heard, or in **John's** gospel we found that Mary Magdalene had gone alone to the tomb, when she found the stone rolled away from the entrance, she **ran and told** Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved. Then they all went back to the tomb together.

Later that **same** evening is where today's gospel reading from John begins. **Every** year this text is the assigned lectionary reading for the **second** Sunday of

Easter. As I talked about with the youth in the children's sermon today, **most** of us know the story of the disciple Thomas pretty well. In **our** day and age when we hear the term '*doubting Thomas*' we rather **quickly** know what is meant. It is **usually** ascribed to an unbeliever. Does **faith** come from seeing or does **faith** come to those who have not seen and yet, still, have **come to believe**? *Was what Jesus wanted to know.*

That being said, today I would like to focus our attention on another portion of this reading. I want to focus **not only** on the fear and unbelief of those who went to the tomb only to find it **empty**, to focus **not only** on the fear and unbelief of the disciples that **every** same evening (**not** that their fears were unfounded to be sure), or to **not only** focus so much the **fear** but the unbelief of Thomas who just wanted the same verification of our **risen** Lord that the other disciples had had so that **he too** could or would believe as well.

As much as the disciples' feelings are the real human part of the story; I want to put our focus on the alternative that Jesus offered His disciples when he appeared to them which is, *did you notice that 3 times within these verses when Jesus appeared he offered the disciples 'peace' by saying, "Peace be with you."*

The other day during **Holy Week** I was out changing the sign board as you go out at the **end** of our driveway. **One** of the women who drives the trolley for

the city to pick up the jurors **stopped** her trolley, **opened** the door, and **asked** me about our worship services on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. She said that she was Jewish and what she **liked** about our sign is that on the top it says, “*Go In Peace*”. She said that **every** time she leaves our parking lot she **looks** at that sign and **thinks** about what that sign means and how it speaks to her. How the depth of the word ‘peace’, for her ‘shalom’, means **so** much. It was good to hear her story and how our sign brings a sense of God’s peace to her as she travels along her day.

I would like to tell you more about the **depth** of the Hebrew meaning of the word ‘peace’ or ‘shalom’ as the Jewish people say. Shalom comes from the **root verb** sha-lam in Hebrew and sa-li-ma in Aramaic. Hebrew words many times go **far beyond** their surface meaning. Hebrew words convey a deep feeling, an intent, and emotion.

What Jesus **offered** his disciples was more than just simply peace as we know it; what He was **offering** them was completeness; a deep and holistic sense of wellbeing. The kind of peace the **world** cannot give. He **offered** them the peace that could only come from God. He was offering them contentment, health, wholeness, welfare, perfectness, prosperity, and harmony. He was **offering** them a way of being reconciled with God—**all** combined within the one word that we know as peace.

So in their fears Jesus was **not** offering his disciples '*relax, it will be alright*'. What he was **offering** them was a true release from their fear of the Jews; which for them was **very real** given the events of the day. Jesus was **offering** them a release from their **unbelief**, a release from that which **gripped** them so tightly that they were behind closed, locked doors.

Let me ask you—Is there anything in **your** life that has now or in the past **gripped** you with fear or unbelief so tightly that it keeps **you** or has kept **you** behind closed or locked doors—*physically, emotionally, or spiritually*?

Just as in Jesus' time; fear and unbelief is a prevalent way of being for so **many** people in our world today. Fear of losing a job, fear of losing a loved one, fear of losing our health, fear of **not** being good enough, fear of ...*you name it*..... or I do not believe that I can do this, I do not believe that will ever happen for me, I do not believe...*you name it*..... **Jesus'** presence in our lives, can give us the **peace** which can combat **any** of the fears or unbelief's that we may have.

Jesus' greeting to his disciples was **not** a statement of what he wished for them; it was a statement of fact, a statement of a present reality for them. The **greeting** of peace which Jesus offered them conveyed an offer of something which

was from **God** Himself. A **greeting** which would keep them from harm, a **greeting** which would squash any fears or unbelief.

I wonder: Are we **that** much different today from the disciples? Do **we** have anxiety and fear in our lives that betrays our **own** belief? As people the natural thing to do when we are feeling anxious or threatened is to **hunker** down, **lock** the doors, and **close** the world in around us—either physically or emotionally. We become more focused on our **own** security than being willing to step out and take a risk. This is even **true** as church. When **fear** creeps in we become more closed to the mission and purpose to which **God** is calling us.

The **promise** of this text for us is that Jesus cannot be stopped by **any** of our locked doors. Jesus comes to us here and now **just** as he came to the first disciples' right in the midst of their fears and unbelief. He came to them **speaking** words of God's peace and God's consolation. Jesus keeps **coming to us** week after week **not wanting us to miss out** on the life and peace he **continues** to bring to us. Thanks be to God that He keeps sending us out of our **safe, locked** rooms, **sending us out beyond** our own fears and **beyond** our own unbelief's into a world that, like us, so desperately needs to hear the **Good News** of God's gifts of life and peace for all. **AMEN.**

