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Easter 2

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Peace Won, Peace Given”

Text: John 20:19-31 (Acts 5:29-42; 1 Peter 1:3-9)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Christ is risen! [He is risen indeed! Alleluia!]

Easter is not enough.

Yes, that’s right. You didn’t mishear, and I didn’t misspeak. Easter is not enough. Forgiveness won must be forgiveness given. Our peace with God must be a peace proclaimed. If not, the disciples would probably *still* be locked in that upper room!

For imagine the disciples that night. The fear, the questions. Their hearts were pounding through their chests. Their hands were sweating. Every noise they heard . . . *what was that?* And every hour that went by made the fear not better, but worse. Their imaginations were running wild. Every time they closed their eyes in sleep a nightmare would jolt them back awake. And then the torture of the wouldas, couldas, and shouldas. . . . They were hopeless. They were helpless. They were captives. This upper room was their coffin, nailed shut with the hammer of fear.

But then into their coffin steps life. The resurrected Jesus comes to them. And while His presence gave them joy, it was His words that set them free. *Peace be with you.* For with those words, they knew Jesus did not hold their sin and failure against them. He did not hold their fear and doubt against them. He did not chastise them for being there behind locked doors. He forgave them, and let their fingers read – like Braille! – God’s love for them, carved on His hands and side. And with that they are raised to life again! For just as death and the tomb could not keep Jesus in, so He would not let the deathly coffin of fear and death keep His disciples in. For this is why He came. This is why He died and rose again. This is why He lives. To set us free. To give us joy and life again.

For it is not just first century disciples that lock themselves into upper rooms, for fear of the Jews. What is it with your life? What has happened to you? What coffins of fear or sin are you in? What wouldas, couldas, and shouldas haunt your mind? What are you running away from? . . . Oh, maybe you do not live in fear every day. Perhaps you have mastered the art of hiding your guilt, of hiding your hurt, or hiding your fear, and putting on a happy face. But while you may be able to fool some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time . . . it's still there. And it still hurts. And it still worries. And it still drags you down. It is a coffin robbing you of your life and joy. Your own little upper room with locked doors and enormous fears.

And so the One who came for His disciples **then** is the One who comes *for you today*. Who doesn't wait for you to open up your bunkered down, barred up heart and invite Him in – but who comes to give you what you need; who comes to set you free. That His *peace be with you*. With you Mike. You too, John. With you, Susan. And you, Mary. With all of you here today. Peace. For all is well. As we will sing: *Jesus Lives! The Victory's Won!* (LSB #490) He is not here to accuse, but to forgive. Not to demand, but to provide. Not to burden you down, but to raise you up. For in Him the wages of sin have been paid, the fires of hell quenched, satan's accusing lips sown shut, and the prison house of sin and death opened, once and for all. He shows you His wounds and doesn't say, *Look what you did to me!* but instead, *Look what I have done for you*. That in Him you may live not in regret and fear, but in joy and peace.

That is the joy and peace that caused Peter – who was in the coffin of the upper room that night – to write: *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead . . .”* Yes, raised is what they were! Born again from a coffin of fear and death to a new life of faith, which no one could take away from them. Not the Jews, or the Romans. For it is *“an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, [being] kept in heaven . . .”* So that while there is still struggling and suffering in this world, the sin in the world and the sin in us cannot defeat us. For it has been defeated. By the One who is the resurrection and the life. By Him who burst His grave and ours. By the One who does not hold our sins against us, but took them upon Himself, so that we may live in peace and joy.

And that this peace and joy may be ours as well, is why Jesus gives His peace *twice* to His disciples that night. Did you notice the repetition? **First**, Jesus gives His peace

to those frightened and sinful men, **then** He gives it a second time, that they now give it to others, in their office as apostles, or sent ones. For notice how the second is an expansion of the first. (+) Jesus now commissions and sends them. Just as Jesus was sent from the Father with His authority, so now Jesus sends them with His authority. (+) He breathes His Holy Spirit upon them. Why? Didn't they have it before? Yes, they did, as Christians. Now He gives it to them for their office, to give to others. (+) And then He "ordains" them - that is, He gives them their orders: *Go and forgive*. Forgive, just as I have forgiven you. Forgive freely and generously. Forgive the sins of those who are penitent; and withhold the sins of those who are not, so they may see their sin, repent, and receive this forgiveness too. Forgive, so that *blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed*. Blessed as well with My forgiveness, life, salvation, and peace.

And that is the blessing with which you have been blessed. That is why at the beginning of the service I speak the words of absolution as I do. **Almighty God in His mercy has given His Son to die for you and for His sake forgives you all your sins.** That's Easter. That's Jesus death and resurrection. That's all that the Father sent His Son to do for you. *But that's not all I say.* Then, **as a called and ordained servant of Christ, and by His authority . . .** There's what we heard today - the calling, commissioning, and sending of servants to give the forgiveness and peace won by Christ. And so that is what I speak: **I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.** And so it is not me doing it, but the One who sent me; who sent me here for you. Because He wants to come here, into *this* room, *this* day, and set you free.

For your Lord wants you to be sure. Sure of your life and forgiveness, and that you receive what you need the most. That we do not just play church here, and do what we want and make ourselves feel good about ourselves. That would not only not be doing us any good, but be a deception and fraud of the worst kind. No. That simply will not do! I am not here because I decided to be here, but because I was put here, by the call of God issued through this congregation. And I do not speak these words by my own authority, but by the authority of Jesus, given to this office, for men to speak on His behalf. That the forgiveness and peace won by Jesus in His death and resurrection, be the forgiveness and peace given to you, personally and individually and really. To raise you up. That you be not hopeless or helpless, but filled with the life and the joy that God created you to have, and wants you to live.

And what effect did that forgiveness and peace have on the disciples? We see it in

the reading we heard from Acts. No longer do they lock themselves in an upper room, filled with fear - now they cannot be shut up! Now they rejoice at being counted worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus! They are like all new people . . . for they are all new people. Made new by Jesus. By His life. By His resurrection. By the confidence of His victory over all our foes.

And that is the victory He won for you as well, and the life He gives to you here, as He says *not touch my hands and side, but eat my body and drink my blood*. But it is the same body and blood, to strengthen us and lead us from unbelief to faith. From doubt to certainty. From fear to forgiveness. From death to life. That raised and set free, you live the life He has given you to live, in *your* place, in *your* office, wherever that may be, and whatever it may be. To love and serve and forgive as you have been by Him. That all may see in you the life and joy of Christ. That Easter be not only an historical event - but a reality in your life, each and every day you live. That His forgiveness won, be His forgiveness given, and lived.

For Christ is risen! [He is risen indeed! Alleluia!]

Peace be with you.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.