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Easter 2

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“The Voice That Breaks the Silence of Sin”  
Text: John 20:19-31 (Acts 5:29-42)

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

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

As my family and I were driving around recently, we saw a sign along the road that said: *Speak only to improve the silence.*

That’s what Jesus did in the Holy Gospel today.

The disciples had gathered together in a room that Easter night. They probably didn’t know what to say, and any words they *did* say were probably awkward and inadequate. The tomb was empty - Peter and John had seen that. The women reported seeing Jesus. But what did it all mean? For them now? For the future? What were the Romans going to do? What were the Jewish leaders going to do? What should *they* do? What should they say?

The silence in that room was perhaps only surpassed by the turmoil in their hearts and minds. About what they *could* have done, what they *should* have done, and what they *would* do if they could hit the rewind button and do it all again. . . . But they couldn’t. And now . . . now what?

That is the silence and turmoil when sin reigns.

The silence like when Adam and Eve sinned and their fellowship with God was broken. I think the garden suddenly got very silent, as togetherness gave way to separation, as joy turned to grief, and our first parents hid themselves in ashamed silence, in self-condemning silence. We do it, too. Because of our sin maybe we separate ourselves from the church, or our prayers grow silent, or we’re here, but in our hearts and minds we’re a thousand miles away.

It is the silence also when in sin our fellowship with each other is broken - in churches, in marriages, in friendships. We stop talking to one another; we give someone the cold shoulder; we begin to avoid one another.

But all the while, while there is outward silence, there is inward turmoil. The couldas, wouldas, and shouldas. The doubts and fears, the worries and shame, the anger and hatred directed at others, and that we direct at ourselves.

The silence and turmoil when sin reigns.

And for the disciples, that was the silence of death. The voice of the very Son of God had been silenced. The voice that forgave sins, that comforted the lonely, that calmed the storms at sea, that called them to follow, that taught with authority, and that raised the dead . . . now silent. Oh, what they would do to hear it once again! To have one more chance. To repent of falling asleep when He was praying, and of denying Him, and of running away in fear . . .

The silence and turmoil when sin reigns.

And then Jesus appears to them and breaks the silence! ***Peace be with you***, He says. *Twice*. Which is not just a way of saying "howdy!" It is much more than that. It is the peace of God. It is the peace of sins forgiven. It is the peace of a restored fellowship with God. It is the peace of the resurrection.

For God does not give us the cold shoulder when we sin - He comes to us and breaks the silence. Lent and Holy Week were all about God coming to us and taking our sin upon Himself. *The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*. Easter is now about God coming to us and giving us His victory, His forgiveness, His now-resurrected life. That you might know. That you might live. That you might believe.

And so He came to Adam and Eve and called out: *Where are you?* And promised to send a Saviour to overcome the silence and turmoil of their sin. He came to the disciples and proclaimed to them: *Peace!* Promised fulfilled. And now He comes calling you by the proclamation of His Gospel of peace. That whoever you are, wherever you are, and whatever you have done, ***peace be with you*** - your sins are forgiven. Believe it. You do not have to deal with your sin - you cannot. But Jesus did. The Lamb of God is *your* Lamb, your forgiveness, your life.

And so the voice of the Son of God could not remain silent, but in His resurrection speaks now more loudly than ever. To silence our doubts and fears. To silence our regrets - all our shouldas, wouldas, and couldas. To silence the lies of satan.

No wonder the church breaks her silence with so many *alleluias* during the Easter season! And from how many mouths, all over the world?

Which is exactly as our Lord would have it. For when Jesus gave His peace to His disciples, He then told them to speak it to others.

***“Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” And when he 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 withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”***

The peace of forgiveness they would now proclaim to the world. They would be the mouths that would deliver the peace and forgiveness of Christ to the world. *Which they did*, for it seems as if they immediately went out and told Thomas. And which they continued to do, which is why the Jewish leaders got upset with them in the first reading we heard from the book of Acts and wanted to kill them. They could not keep silent. Jesus not only forgave them and gave them their life back; He gave them a voice. He gave them His Spirit.

And now, pastors continue to speak as the apostles did - feeding the flocks of Jesus entrusted to their care with His Word of peace and forgiveness. That the silence of sin and death continue to be broken by the voice of life and hope.

The voice of life as those born in sin are raised to life through the Spirit-filled waters of Holy Baptism.

The voice of hope to call those mired in sin to repentance, and then to speak forgiveness through the words of Holy Absolution.

And the voice of the one who feeds the world with His own Body and Blood, conquering our death and mortality with the food of immortality.

And in all these ways, our Saviour’s ***“Peace be with you”*** is still sounding forth in all the world. Our Saviour’s forgiveness still being given in all the world.

But not only do pastors speak this Word of life and hope, all of you also take our Lord’s peace and forgiveness out into the world as well. That what you receive, you also give, and not keep silent. In your families and marriages, in your schools and workplaces, you take:

Words of forgiveness to those who are weighed down by sin.

Words of hope to those who have no hope. Words of life to those who are dying.

Words of truth to the vexed and confused. Words of peace to those in turmoil.

Words of comfort and joy to those who are downcast.

Words of love to those who are outcast. Words of faith to the doubting.

*Words of resurrection.*

Words that you can speak because these are words that have been spoken to you.

Words that actually do not improve the silence, but shatter it and scatter it!

Just as Jesus did in His resurrection. Just as Jesus did in that room with His disciples that night. Just as Jesus does for you.

That blessed be not only the small number of those who actually got to see Jesus before His ascended, but ***blessed be those who have not seen, and yet have believed.*** How? Through the Word. The Word that breaks the silence and turmoil of sin. Our Lord's Word of forgiveness and peace.

That Word now comes to you today. Into your ears and into your mouths. That you may not be unbelieving, but believing. That you may *taste and see that the Lord is good and take refuge in Him* (Psalm 34:8). For as the disciples found out, locked doors are no refuge. Locked hearts are only prisons of our own making. But the one who broke the seal of the grave; the one who broke the power of sin and death; the one who comes through locked doors; the one we welcomed at Christmas as the Prince of Peace, yes, He is our peace.

For the tomb is empty, and you are forgiven. You are free.  
For Christ is risen! [*He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*]

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.