

15 April 2012
Easter 2

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“See His Wounds!”
Text: John 20:19-31

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

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

The Holy Gospel for today is in two parts. **The first half** is Jesus appearing to the ten disciples, holed up behind locked doors for fear of the Jews. Holed up in confusion that Sunday night because of the news reports they have been receiving - from Mary Magdalene, who said she saw Jesus; from Peter and John who saw the grave clothes and the empty tomb; and then from those two disciples walking to Emmaus who ran back to town and said that Jesus had been with them. They didn't know quite what to make of it all. And then there was the guilt that still oppressed them all. Peter for denying his Lord, the others for running away like cowards. They had all been so brave when they didn't need to be brave. *We'll never leave you*, they all had said. *We'll stand by you no matter what!* Right. Big words, but look at them now. When the going gets tough the tough get going? Well, they got going alright! And how ashamed they were now were. Shame on top of fear on top of sadness on top of confusion. They were a jumbled mess.

Until Jesus came to them. He didn't knock, didn't open the doors . . . suddenly, He was just there with them. **“Peace be with you”** He says. And He shows them His hands and side. **Then**, we are told, **the disciples were glad**. Saying it like that makes it sound so matter-of-fact. Yeah, I would say they were glad! They rejoiced! They celebrated. All of a sudden, all that was oppressing them and shaming them and burdening them and worrying them *was gone*. None of it mattered anymore. Jesus was there. Jesus was alive. *Jesus forgave them*. So yeah, they were glad.

Then there is **the second half**, about the one who was not with them that night: Thomas. Doubting Thomas. Still stuck in his shame and worry and fear and confusion, Thomas. Thomas still speaking big words. For that's what we do when we're afraid, isn't it? We talk big and try to cover up what we're really feeling inside. Thomas talks big: **“Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.”** . . . OK, Thomas - here ya' go, Jesus says eight days later. Interestingly, the Scriptures never tell us if Thomas actually did it - put his fingers in the holes or

his hand into Jesus' side. Maybe he chickened out. Maybe Jesus had to grab his hand and stick it in his side! But then Thomas, too, is overwhelmed in a flood of joy and relief and forgiveness. **"My Lord and my God!"** he cries out. Maybe literally crying out, with tears streaming down his face.

So a Gospel story with two parts, two halves. But what's the same in both, what makes them a whole and makes the difference in both, **are the wounds of Jesus**. Those *fresh* wounds. They didn't go away when Jesus rose from the dead. They're still there. Those holes in Jesus' hands that you could see through. His side that had been torn open by the soldier's spear to prove that He was dead - so that was no small prick, but a hard and deep thrust. . . . He showed them - *all of them*, not just Thomas - His hands and His side, the fresh wounds. To show them that this body which had been on the cross, is alive again. That this body, which had been crushed in sin and death, was not conquered by sin and death. That this body of the Lamb of God which had been offered up for the sin of the world has taken away the sin of the world.

And so the fresh wounds of Jesus are not there to remind the disciples of their guilt, but to proclaim His victory and their forgiveness. He took our sin and guilt and condemnation - see? He was wounded and died for it all. But look at that death now - *the grave is empty!* And look at those wounds now - *they are glorious!* For they show our Lord's love. They show our Lord's compassion. And so Jesus shows them off. See them, touch them, and rejoice! *The Strife is Over, the Battle Done* (LSB #464). So what left is there to say, but **"Peace be with you."** Peace of heart, mind, and soul in the forgiveness of your sins.

And so the disciples' big words which until now had caused them such shame and pain, and Thomas' big words which proclaimed his unbelief, were now met and overcome by Jesus' big words: **Peace be with you**. You are forgiven. Now go and do the same. Go and forgive others. **Just as the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.**

This forgiveness is what the church is all about. The church does a lot of other things - showing mercy, encouraging and supporting one another, living together in faith; and those things are important - but those things are not what the church is all about. The church is all about forgiveness. That is job one. That is what makes the church the church. And when the church forgives, she is doing exactly what Jesus not only *commanded* that night, but what Jesus did that Easter night: *showing His wounds*. When we forgive, we are saying **Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world**. Who takes away your sin. For look! Look at the holes, look at His side. Your sins are on Him and not on you. You can be sure; your sins are forgiven.

Yes, those are the big words Jesus has now given us to say. His words of forgiveness. And we must never tire of saying them. Or hearing them. We must never tire of rejoicing when those nail-pierced hands baptize another person at this font and their sins are washed away. We must never tire of rejoicing when we hear those words spoken to us shamed sinners, returning to our Lord every Sunday with our tails between our legs, to be greeted by those words: *Peace be with you. I forgive you all your sins.* We must never tire of our Lord giving us the Body and Blood that hung on the cross, not for us to merely touch and feel, but for us to eat and to drink, for the forgiveness of our sins. And know that ***blessed are [we] who have not seen and yet have believed.*** Blessed are we who have been given the gifts of faith and forgiveness and life.

But not only here, in the liturgy, but out there, in the world, we have those wounds to show and these big words to say: *I forgive you.* When you don't, or *won't* say those words, what is your silence saying? And why do we do that? What locked doors are you hiding behind? What sin and fear has locked you in? What can you not entrust to the forgiveness and love of the Lord?

But at just such moments, that's when Jesus comes to you, through His Spirit, through the word spoken by the Church, or through a brother or sister in Christ . . . Jesus comes through the locked doors of your heart, and shows you His wounds. He knows you've been wounded and hurt; those are the wounds that He now bears. He knows the hell you've been through, He knows the pains and fear, He knows the betrayal and slander - even from your closest friends. He knows. *See my hands and my side,* He says. And then: ***Peace be with you.*** Your wounds are my wounds, you sins my sins, your death my death. ***I forgive you.***

And so you, now, can forgive too. Not in your strength, but with His. Not because of your wounds, but because of His. And show the world the power of the cross, the power of Jesus' death and resurrection, the power of Jesus' forgiveness. And fill the world with it. That forgiveness begins here, but it doesn't end here. It goes with you. Jesus breathed on His disciples and commissioned them as His apostles. Pastors are called and ordained to speak that same Word of forgiveness to you. But you, too, as the priesthood of the baptized, baptized into Christ and His wounds and given His Spirit, are sent into your homes and vocations with these same big words of forgiveness. That those still locked in sin and fear and shame may see the wounds of Christ, and believe and confess: ***My Lord and my God. The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.***

The disciples needed that that night. Not a day goes by when we don't need it. Especially those times when, shamed by our sins, we think: *What will the Lord do with me?* What will He do with you? We heard today - He forgives you! See His wounds? His *glorious* wounds? They're for you. To unlock whatever has you locked

in, to wash away your jumbled mess of sin. See His wounds? His *glorious* wounds? They're for you. Take eat, take drink. Depart in peace. See His wounds? His glorious wounds? They're for you! So rejoice! For Christ is risen! [He is risen indeed! Alleluia!] 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.