

7 April 2013
Easter 2

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Here For You”

Text: John 20:19-31; Acts 5:12-20; Revelation 1:4-18

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 book of Hebrews tells us that we have a great high priest who can sympathize with us, who knows what you're going through, who knows your weakness, who knows what you need. Even better than you know what you need. We are often wrong. He never is.

Jesus knew what we needed. That's why He came into our world to atone for our sin. Jesus knew what we needed. That's why He came into that locked room filled with terrified and not-knowing-what-to-do-next disciples on that first Easter evening. To give them the forgiveness and peace that they needed. The forgiveness and peace He just accomplished for them on the cross He gives to them in His resurrection.

Jesus knew what they needed. Our great high priest knows.

Jesus knew. He knew their fears. He knew the confusion that was swirling in their minds and the turmoil that was raging in their hearts. He knew the feelings of guilt and shame that were tormenting their souls. He knew. He knew the overwhelming burden of their failure that was weighing heavy upon them. He knew the doubts that drove them to near despair - would they be forgiven for what they had done and what they had failed to do? *Could* they be?

Jesus knew. He knew that even when He appeared to them they would wonder if He were a ghost, or if it was His Spirit haunting them. When He returned a week later, He knew what Thomas had said and his stubborn unbelief.

Jesus, your great high priest, knows. He knows the questions and He has the answers. Maybe not the answers we want, but the answers we need. He answers our sin and guilt with His forgiveness. He answers our death with His resurrection. He answers our fear with His presence and His peace. He has conquered it all and now gives His victory to us. That we may be ***not unbelieving, but believing***. And

rejoice in Him.

And the disciples did. Was God with them in that room behind locked doors because God is present everywhere anyway? Sure. But that wasn't much comfort. Jesus knew they needed not just a "well we know He's here, somewhere" God, but a "He's here for me" Saviour. Jesus knew, and so He came. In the flesh. To raise them from their sin and fear to a new life in Him.

And Jesus knows that's what you need as well. "I know God is with me because He's present everywhere" just doesn't cut it when you're locked in fear and sin and darkness and impending death and God seems a million miles away. Like the young child crying out for mom in the middle of the night, who knows mom's there, in the house, maybe even right in the next room, but that's not good enough. That's a million miles away in child miles. He needs mom *there*. She needs mom's *touch*.

So it was with the disciples; *so it is often with us*. And so Jesus, who was soon to ascend, not only comes to His disciples, but then send them out to do what He has done for them, to give what He has given to them, and to speak what He has spoken to them. To go to those still behind locked doors, or locked in dying bodies, or those who locked the doors of their hearts in fear, and give them Christ. Not to be a poor substitute, the disciples like the baby sitter who is a poor substitute for mom, *but to give them their Saviour*. To go to them with Him. With His Spirit and His peace, with His forgiveness and His life, with His presence and His love.

Jesus said to them again, "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 anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld."

We usually associate those words with Absolution in the church, and rightly so. But they are more than that. They include *wherever* Christ and His forgiveness and life is given: in absolution, yes, but also in baptism, in the proclamation of the Gospel, and in our Lord's Supper. Jesus wants His answer, His forgiveness, His victory, His life, *Himself*, to be given lavishly to people everywhere and in every need, through the means He has established to do just that. And so He sends His disciples into all the world. To bring His Easter to all the world. To a world *lying still in death's strong bands* (LSB #458) - those strong bands that Jesus broke and would break for each and every person.

And that's what we heard was happening in the reading from Acts. The disciples, now apostles (or sent ones), were out among the people, proclaiming Christ and giving Christ and His victory. And people were coming to them from all over.

People in great need who knew their need. People who were sick and diseased. People tormented by unclean spirits. And just as Christ had touched and raised and gave life to His disciples in the locked room that Easter night, so all who came to the apostles were raised and healed and given life. That wasn't the apostles doing that, but Jesus still coming to those in need, really and truly, *through* them, to provide what He knew was needed. Bringing Easter. Bringing life.

But we also heard that *not all* were coming. Those who thought they were doing just fine and had no need - maybe because they were healthy, or because they were prosperous, or because they were in positions of power and authority - worked against the apostles. They threatened them and arrested them. They did not want to hear the Word of God. They did not want Jesus. But Jesus would not be so easily stopped! And so an angel of the Lord comes and releases the apostles. The Word of God cannot be bound, and His Easter continued to spread.

And now - a few years later, but in the same way - **His Word and victory has come here to this place.** Jesus knows what you need and so He comes to you, now. He comes to raise us and give us His Spirit, forgiveness, and life as He touches us in Baptism, speaks to us in the Gospel and Absolution, and feeds us in His Supper. To us who are in need. . . . *Right? We are in need, right?* . . . We are, and sometimes we know it and are like those crowds, coming for what we need and you couldn't keep us away no matter what! Yet at other times maybe we're like the disciples, locked in sin and fear, those sinful thoughts and deeds shaming us into hiding. And maybe at yet other times we've been deceived into thinking we're doing just fine in our spiritual lives and we don't realize our need, and so we become proud or indifferent. Or sometimes maybe you're just too tired, or too busy to read, to study, to pray, to come, to confess . . .

However you are, Jesus knows. He knows what you need, even better than you know what you need. And so He is here. Just as He came for the disciples, so He comes for you. Because He knows it's only a matter of time before time and sin catch up to all. When our *doing just fine* turns out to be not so fine at all. When health, wealth, and happiness go away. When all words of hope or encouragement go silent. When friends we thought we could count on have left the building. When death rears its ugly head - either for you or a loved one. And we are exposed for who we really are. Dying sinners.

Easter is our Lord's answer to a dying world. His Word of hope, of a future, of forgiveness. It is the word of everlasting life from the one who is **the alpha and the omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.** The one who was here before us and who will be here after us. And His Word is: I died for you, that you who die may live. I died for you, that you who are sinners may be forgiven. I died for you, that you who are captive to fear and death be set free. I died for you and

rose for you and now live to give all of this to you. What you need. What you need to lead a holy life, die a blessed death, and live forever.

Those terrified disciples needed to hear that word that first Easter night. We disciples need to hear that word, too. And the world is filled with people who need to hear that word. Maybe some are not ready yet, thinking they are doing just fine. But many are now, and many will be. And as the disciples were sent, and pastors are sent, so too are you sent, in your callings, into your homes and schools and workplaces and neighborhoods, that the Lord fill the world with His word of life and forgiveness. For there are some locked doors, to homes and hearts, where perhaps only you can go. The church is not welcome, the pastor is not welcome, but you are. And you, who have received such wonderful grace and gifts and the Word and Spirit of our Lord, can speak His Word of hope, forgiveness, and life. And so bring Christ to a dying world. And say to those locked in sin, in fear, and in death: **Fear not.** *Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!* His forgiveness is for you, His life is for you, His resurrection is for you. **Fear not.** The grave could not hold Him, and will not hold those whom He makes His own. **Peace be with you.**

And so we prayed earlier that our Lord would enable us to do just that: *Almighty God, grant that we who have celebrated the Lord's resurrection may by Your grace confess in our life and conversation that Jesus is Lord and God.*

Yes, Jesus knows what you need. And so He comes today to give you Himself. Today He bids you not to place your fingers into the holes in His hands or thrust your hand into His side, but places his Body into your mouth and pours His Blood over your lips. The very same body and blood that Thomas and the others touched, given to you for the forgiveness of your sins. To raise you to life again.

For Satan isn't going to give up. Just a quick look around at what is happening in our country and our world will quickly confirm that! But **fear not!** He did not win, and He will not win. Jesus' resurrection shows there is no foe, no trouble, no doom that is greater than He. He is, as we heard from John in Revelation: **the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.** He is the one who has **the keys of death and hell.** He is the one **who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.** This one now comes for you, for He knows what you need. He comes for you, for He knows you cannot do it on your own. He is here for you, your great high priest.

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.