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Easter 2

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Alleluia! (Part Two)”

Text: John 20:19-31; Acts 5:12-32; Revelation 1:4-18

[This sermon is a sequel to last week. It follows the same thought sequence and uses many of the same words to describe the situation of the disciples to parallel it to that of the women at the tomb, and how the Word of God gives us hope and life in the midst of fear and death.]

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.

Alleluia. That’s what the disciples wanted to say. But they didn’t know how. They didn’t have it in them. All that filled their hearts was sorrow and grief . . . and fear. All that filled their minds were the horrible images of that day - an abused friend, a crucified and dead Saviour . . . and the thoughts of the Jews out there right now, looking for them next. So there was no joy for them. No alleluias they could utter. Only silence as they sat behind locked doors. The sealing of the doors, though, nothing compared to the sealing of hopelessness and despair into their hearts and minds.

And minute after minute, hour after hour, it just got worse. *Nathanael, you made sure the windows were locked, right?* The women had come back with a report that Jesus was risen - but they chalked that up to emotion and wishful thinking. *Andrew, double check the door again.* They’d have to go out sometime. They were getting hungry. How could it end this way? The fear Peter had felt before when he denied was multiplied now. They all felt it. Talk about a nightmare turning into real life . . .

Perhaps you understand the disciples. Perhaps you’ve been there. Like we considered last week, wanting to say alleluia, wanting to praise the Lord, but not being able, not knowing how. Fear and trembling locking the door of your heart and filling your mind with horrible thoughts of what could be; worst-case scenarios. And as far as you can tell, no end in sight. Wishing things could be different. Wondering why things are happening and where the heck is God when you need Him - really, really, need Him. That’s a tough place to be.

But just as Jesus was exactly where He needed to be for the women, so He is exactly where He needs to be for His disciples. And for us. Just as we heard last week that He needed to be on the cross and He needed NOT to be in the tomb, so He needed to be next

in that room with His disciples. *And so He is.* He appears among them, seemingly from out of nowhere. The doors still locked, the windows still locked, but they are no longer alone. There is Jesus . . . and they are frightened, uncertain, questioning, unsure of what is going to happen next.

Well, what happened next was the Word of God. Just seeing Jesus didn't bring the disciples the relief they needed. When they had seen Him walking on the water, they thought it was a ghost - was this? How else could He have come through locked doors? And why was He there? Was He angry at them for denying and running away? Was He going to chastise them? Haunt them? . . . No, none of that. ***"Peace be with you"*** He says. ***And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side.*** Peace, not anger. A real body, not a ghost. The same body, with the holes and everything, but it was different too. The scars not His shame but His glory. And ***then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.*** It was Him! The women were right!

Alleluia! They could say it! Finally. Their sorrow shattered and their fear banished by His preaching of peace. The same voice that had filled them with such hope and life before was now doing it again. The same voice that had raised the dead was now doing it again. Raising them. He was not dead - no, death was dead! And their hearts, once so full of hope and then crushed, were now filled to overflowing again! Jesus did it! Jesus won! *Alleluia!*

And that same peace and life is yours as well. Jesus intends it not only for the disciples locked up in that room that night, but for all whose hearts and minds are locked in fear and worry, locked from the truth, locked up by sin and death. **For He sends His disciples with this same word of peace.** He gives them His Holy Spirit and He commissions them. They are no longer disciples (followers), they are now apostles (sent ones). And so after their happy reunion, He says it again. ***"Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me - into the world, and to you - even so I am sending you"*** - into the world, and to all people. ***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."***

And so that same peace and life, that same *forgiveness* and life, won by Jesus in His death and resurrection, that had unlocked the hearts and minds of the disciples and set them free, is today here for you. For you, too, have heard the proclamation of this Word. The life given in baptism is given to you. The forgiveness given in the Absolution is given to you. The Holy Spirit is breathed into you through the Word. That you, too, say *Alleluia!* That you, too, know and believe that the victory of Christ is your victory. *Even* in a world still filled with sin and death.

For notice: **nothing really changed** for the disciples in the world. The Jews were still out there. The Romans were still out there. The danger and hatred was still out there. And yet

in Christ, **everything had changed** for the disciples. That's what we heard in the reading from Acts, *nothing could stop them*. The Jews threatened them, threw them in prison - it didn't matter. In Jesus, sin was forgiven. In Jesus, death was defeated. In Jesus, even crucifixion had been overcome. What could men, or even the demons, do to them now? *Christ Jesus lay in death's strong bands . . . But now at God's right hand He stands and brings us life from heaven* (LSB #458 v.1). Life, forgiveness, and confidence.

So like for the disciples, maybe nothing has really changed for you in the world. You have troubles and struggles, fears and uncertainties, too. At work, at home, at school. With your health or the health of someone you love. About something that happened in the past or what is looming in the future. And these are not little things! They're real, and sometimes choke the *alleluia* right out of you, or drown it in a tsunami of worry, or make you lock things up tight 'cause you don't want to get hurt again, get your hopes dashed again . . . The temptation to give into despair and doubt, hopeless and fear, can be quite heavy.

But just as neither a sealed tomb nor locked doors could stop Jesus, so too does He now come to you, in His Word of life. To give you hope and peace.

For consider the apostle John. He was in that locked room that night with the others, and he was also later in the midst of more struggles and trials, being imprisoned in exile *on the island called Patmos*. He knew the fear of that night. He had been thrown in prison. He had suffered at the hands of the Jews for preaching the word, and he had endured the news of all His fellow apostles dying horrible deaths. He was the only one left. Life had been and was rough for John, as maybe it is for you.

And yet it is John who hears and writes and preaches so wondrously of the victory that is ours . . . even when it doesn't feel or seem like it. And so today we heard Jesus say through him, to you: ***I am the Alpha and the Omega; the one who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty***. Nothing is beyond His reach; no time beyond His presence; nothing beyond his power. He is the one who has ***the keys of Death and Hades*** - the keys to unlock and set you free from whatever is holding you down and holding you in. ***His face [is] like the sun shining in full strength***, to cut through the darkness of this world and life. ***Fear not***, He says, ***for I am the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore***. Alive, for you. Alive to give you His victory. Alive to give you *alleluia*!

And He does. As He did to Thomas as well. Thomas the late-comer. Thomas the doubter. Thomas whose heart was locked up as tight as that room. Jesus came to Him, too. Forgave Him, too. And held out His Body to him. That He not disbelieve, but believe.

And that's what Jesus does for you here as well. His Word is here, His Absolution is given, and now He will hold out His Body to you too - but instead of inviting you to touch, He will invite you to eat and drink. Which is better. For with the eating and

drinking of the Lord's true, once-crucified-but-now-risen Body and Blood comes the promise Jesus has attached to such eating and drinking - of forgiveness, of life, and of freedom - freedom from the prison of doubts and fears and worries and troubles that keeps trying to lock you up and hold you down. That you be among those who are ***blessed; who have not seen and yet have believed.***

For you have heard - your Lord, His Word, and His promise. That Word that gave a freeing *alleluia!* to the women, to the disciples, and now to you. *Alleluia!* even as the troubles of life go on. For you have the one greater than all troubles - or even better to say, **He has you.** No matter where you are or what you are going through. He's been there, for you. And He is here, for you.

And now having breathed on you and given you His Spirit and life, He has sent you as well, out into the world, to others - to those around you, those He has given you to serve in all the callings of your life. To live your *alleluia!* To free them with forgiveness. To fill their ears with good news, their hearts with hope, and their minds with the Word of truth. That, as we prayed earlier, 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* (Collect of the Day). That in this battle, in this world and life, He has the last word, and that word is life.

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.