

23 April 2017  
Easter 2

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“The Gift of Peace”

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

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.

***On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews . . .***

The disciples were afraid. You can't blame them. After what they had just seen. Their teacher, their Lord, taken away from them - and so quickly! The last three days had been a blur. And they were afraid. Afraid of what people can do. Afraid of what *these* people could now do to them. Because people can do all kinds of things to them. And to us.

Just look around. People kill. With swords, crosses, guns, bombs, and chemicals. And inventing new ways of killing all the time. People hurt. With whips, words, fists, hate. And inventing new ways of hurting all the time. People oppress, steal, belittle, rape, bully, mud sling, and enslave. And sometimes what is done doesn't even make much sense - as if any of that I just said does, right? But think about it: at the same time babies are being aborted, new ways of conceiving them are being invented! We're worried about health care and yet assisted suicides and mercy killings are on the rise. And while some weapons are banned, others - bigger and more lethal - are being invented.

Those words Jesus spoke from the cross were never truer: *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do* (Luke 23:34). We really don't know what we're doing, do we?

But Jesus does. What *He's* doing. What He came to do. And the cross couldn't stop it. The grave couldn't stop it. A giant stone or a locked door couldn't stop it. In fact, this is what He came to do - break these. Defeat these. Overcome these. So that we who are locked in fear for fear of what people can do to us - and do do to us! - so that we can have peace. And with peace, joy. And with joy, confidence and life.

Because that's really what Jesus was doing for the disciples that night - giving them their life back. Just as He had taken up His life again, risen from death and the grave, so He was giving them their life back again. Raising them from fear and unbelief, to life again.

So He comes to them. To those who thought *He can't come; He can't help*. He comes and helps. And He not only comes, He speaks to them. Words that make all the difference in the world: ***Peace be with you.***

Think of all the things Jesus could have said. Think of all the things the disciples maybe wanted to hear. The things we want to know about life and death and life after death. But Jesus speaks this. Some things are not for us to know now. But **this is**. This is what Jesus wants us to know now. His peace. His forgiveness.

Think also of all the things Jesus could have done. Think of all the things the disciples maybe wanted Him to do. Slay their enemies and take revenge on those who did this to Him. But Jesus does this. This is how He gives peace. Not by getting rid of His - and our - enemies, for then He would have to get rid of those disciples, *and us*, wouldn't He? For the times we in our sin have caused fear and trouble and hurt for others.

And that kind of peace doesn't work and doesn't last anyway. Just ask the Romans. They tried to get peace through the cross. But they couldn't. That's why they had to keep crucifying people. Thousands of people. And you know it too. When one enemy goes away, another springs up in its place.

So no, that is not His peace. This is. The peace of a cross which finally did bring peace. Peace with God. The peace of sins forgiven. The peace of death defeated and the grave torn open. A peace, as Paul would later say, *that passes understanding* (Philippians 4:7). That is there even when it shouldn't be, humanly speaking. But is, because it's not from us, but from God. Not our doing, His doing.

The kind of peace the disciples had that we heard about in the reading from Acts. Those people that killed Jesus were still out there and had, in fact, arrested the disciples. But they are no longer afraid of them. They have peace and joy and confidence when really, they shouldn't have! (Humanly speaking.) It's one of the reason why the Jewish leaders couldn't figure them out. Why are they like that? Why would they rejoice that we beat them? Why would they not stop and so risk their lives?

If they would listen, they would know. For this peace comes through the Word of God. The Word that Jesus spoke to them, and speaks to us. And through His Spirit given to us through the Word that Jesus breathes. The very breath of God, breathed into Adam in the first creation, now breathed into us for re-creation. To give us the forgiveness and life we need.

A new life. A life the same, yet new. Different, yet new. For the Jesus that came to those frightened disciples was the same Jesus they saw nailed to the cross, speared in the side, and laid in the tomb. See? Here are the nail holes, He says. Here is where the spear went in. It's the same Jesus, yet different. New. Resurrected. Triumphant.

And that's the life He has for you. The life He gave to the disciples, to Thomas, and the life He then sent them - and those who would come after them - to keep giving. ***As the Father sent me, even so I am sending you.*** They would go, and He would go with them. They would speak, and He would speak through them. They would forgive, and He would forgive through them. That there be peace for those locked in fear. Life for those locked in death. Forgiveness for those locked in sin. And hope. Hope for resurrection and life. For new life in an old, sinful world.

And the same Peter who was locked in that room that night, would later write about this new life here received - calling it a new birth. We heard those words today. ***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.*** Born again. In Baptism. To a living hope. A new life. The same, yet different. A life, he goes on to say, in the midst of trials, but which the trials cannot overcome. Because its being ***kept in heaven for you.*** Because that's where Jesus is. And where He is, you are, and will be.

So with such a hope, with such a life, though we sometimes want to hide from the world, just like the disciples; and though we may even want to hide from ourselves and what we see in our own hearts and lives . . . we need not hide. No. ***Peace be with you,*** Jesus says. See, here, My Body, My Blood. The same body and blood that hung on the cross. The same body and blood that Thomas groped. The same, but different. New. Resurrected. Living. And here not for your hands but for your lips. Not for proof, but for forgiveness. To pour My new life into you. That you ***taste and see that the Lord is good.***

And ***blessed are you who have not seen*** as the disciples did in that locked room, and yet have had this new life poured into you. ***Blessed are you who have not seen,*** who have not seen as Thomas did, ***and yet have believed.*** *Believed what?* What John said. The reason why he wrote all these things. That ***Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.***

*Life.* New birth. *In His Name.* His Name put on you in Baptism that marks you as His. That marks you as His, and makes you what He is - a son of God. And so you are, as we sang:

*Sons and daughters of the King,  
[to whom] the grave has lost its sting* (LSB #470),  
and so to whom peace has been given. Peace in forgiveness and blessing. To live, and to give. To live not in fear. And with freedom to give to others. *Sons and daughters of the King, to whom the grave has lost its sting.*

For Christ is risen! [*He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*] Alleluia!  
And blessed are you, who believe.

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.