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Second Sunday of Easter – Quasimodo Geniti
April 26, 2022
John 20:19–31
Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church in Muncie, Ind.

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

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.

On that first Easter, what do we find the Twelve doing? They're cowering in fear. Afraid of the Jews. Some say these "Jews" are the religious leaders. But it's more than that. It's also the servant girl outside the High Priest's courtyard. "You were one of them," she said to Peter. "Your accent betrays you," another chimed in. Peter denied Christ three times, denying he even knew Jesus. Calling a curse upon himself and swearing, Peter declared, "I don't know the man!"

The relationship between Peter and his Rabbi was severed. He had sinned, and so he broke down. Peter wept. Deeply. Peter felt the separation between himself and Jesus. And not just Peter, but the other apostles also. When the High Priest's soldiers arrested Jesus, they fled, scattered. Peter showed himself to be braver, but not as brave as young John. But even John's bravery didn't last. He, too, was in the Upper Room, fearful and afraid. Anxious and bereft of peace. Neither peace with God nor with their relatives and countrymen.

Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

Jesus brings peace. Jesus is Himself peace. And His Word gives peace.

We treat "Peace be with you" almost like "May you have peace in the future" or like "Everything's going to be okay." But Jesus is doing more than that. He says, *Eirene humin*, that is, "Peace is with you." Jesus is peace. The Prince of Peace. And He declares forgiveness to the Twelve. Their relationship isn't broken. Rather, it's restored in Jesus Himself.

When [Jesus] had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

Peace, restoration, reconciliation—it comes at a price. That's why Jesus shows them His hands and His side. And it's not like they're just looking at them. Jesus has them touch His hands and side. They think He's a spirit, we're told in Luke, so He has them touch Him to prove He has a body. The body crucified under Pontius Pilate, died, and was buried. The price of peace is the death of God's unique and only Son.

Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."

Where is Jesus sending them? The other Gospels tell us, "You are My witnesses, beginning in Jerusalem." Jerusalem. Beginning with those very Jews from whom they're cowering. "You know those relatives and countrymen and religious leaders?" says Jesus. "I'm sending you to those people. Go first to them."

Think of the people you're afraid of. Think of the people who don't like you—even estranged family members. Think of the people who hate Christians. Perhaps that's why some of your classmates or coworkers don't even know you're Christian. Those are the people you're to go to. You don't have peace with them. Peace requires a relationship of mutual love and support. Peace is more than coexistence or living in the same place at the same time. Peace is closer, much closer, than an uneasy truce.

Consider what's going on in Ukraine. Can there be peace between Ukraine and Russia? They might come to an agreement. Bombardments and bloodshed may cease. But will a close relationship ever come to be? Will Russia and Ukraine become fast friends and allies? Their relationship has been severed. Possibly never to mend.

The same thing happens in our lives. A person sins against us—or we sin against another—and though we might say the words (even that's rare) still the relationship is seemingly forever damaged. Closeness is lost. Trust broken. How many relationships in your lives have ended? How many people do you feel uncomfortable calling up? Maybe you'll just send a text. Maybe not.

But peace is that relationship restored. Jesus appears to the Twelve and tells them that all has been made right between Him and them. He shows them His wounds—not to make them feel bad—but so they know that there's no outstanding cost or debt they owe Him. He's paid it. And that's okay. In fact, that's how it needed to be. After all, He told them that He was going to die and rise, that this was going to happen. Now, He's sending them to their own countrymen and relatives and leaders so that they can give them that same peace. That's just what Peter does on Pentecost. Jesus uses Peter to save about 3,000 people who had cried out for Jesus' crucifixion. Jesus uses Peter to give peace to those who were directly involved in His murder on the cross.

And when [Jesus] 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."

Forgiveness and peace go hand in hand. One results in the other. Forgiveness leads; peace follows. And Jesus breathes on the Twelve.

We've been very concerned the last few years about people breathing on us. Because we recognize that breath brings things with it. Jesus isn't spreading a virus here, but His breath does impart something to the Twelve. It imparts His authority. He's giving them His Holy Spirit. They are anointed, just as Christ was anointed by the Holy Spirit descending on Him and the Father saying, "This is My beloved Son. Listen to Him." Jesus is now saying, "Listen to the Apostles."

But even one of the Twelve has a problem with this.

Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "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."

Thomas doubts the Word of the Apostles. They say they touched Jesus' hands and side. Thomas demands the same. They say they received the Holy Spirit. Thomas demands the same. And the result of Thomas's demands is that his relationship with the others is severed, disrupted, upset. Thomas rejects the others' witness. That's his sin.

That must've been a really awkward week. Thomas was on the out. The others, no matter what they said, couldn't convince Thomas. I think we've all been like Thomas and like Peter and the others. Nothing, short of divine intervention, could bring peace and restore their relationship.

Well, if divine intervention is needed...

Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe."

Jesus is telling Thomas to believe that He has been raised. Jesus is also telling Thomas to believe what the others had been saying. We know this is the case because Jesus says, "Do not disbelieve." What was Thomas disbelieving? The Apostles' Word.

And Jesus gives Thomas peace. Peace between Him and Thomas but also peace among the Twelve. Thomas is restored to Christ and to the others. That's how forgiveness works. "Forgive us our trespasses," we pray, "as we forgive those who trespass against us."

Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"

Because Thomas believes, he proclaims his faith. This is both natural and necessary. One believes with the heart and confesses with the mouth, says St. Paul. So it was with Thomas. So it is with us. That's why we hear the confession of those baptized and confirmed. Like Anna Hase and Pastor Werner this morning. Like Noah Barnet last Saturday. Because they believe, they make their confession before others.

Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Jesus isn't beating up on Thomas. He says this for our benefit. Thomas takes the gentle chiding and rebuke. He can, because he's already got the peace. It's like looking on your past wrongdoings with a friend you dearly love, and he says, "Remember that one time when you...?" And you both laugh. Thomas wasn't distressed by this. That's not Jesus' point. Jesus' point is for our benefit.

We are those who have not seen and yet have believed. None of us have beheld the Risen Lord. We won't until heaven or until the Last Day—whichever comes first. Yet we believe. And we believe because of the Apostles' Word. A Word inspired by the Holy Spirit. A Word that heals and restores, that works reconciliation. A Word of peace. Peace between us and God. Peace with one another.

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Life in Christ's name. Peace and restoration and reconciliation. Both with God and with one another. That's what's been given to us. It's a peace only found in the wounds of Christ. A peace given from the Font and feasted upon in the Supper. A peace witnessed by His Spirit-filled Word. A peace that the world can't understand but desperately needs. A peace Christ sends His Apostles and Church to give to the world.

In Jesus' name.

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