



John 20:19-31 - <sup>19</sup>On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" <sup>20</sup>After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup>Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." <sup>22</sup>And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup>If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." <sup>24</sup>Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup>So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."

<sup>26</sup>A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" <sup>27</sup>Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." <sup>28</sup>Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" <sup>29</sup>Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." <sup>30</sup>Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. <sup>31</sup>But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

*Peace be with you!*



It was December 26, 1944. World War II was raging. A 20 year old Japanese Intelligence officer named Hiroo Onoda was sent to Lubang Island in the Philippines. The orders he received from his commanding officer were simple: *You are absolutely forbidden to die by your own hand. It may take three years, it may take five, but whatever happens, we'll come back for you. Until then, so long as you have one soldier, you are to continue to lead him.* Only a few months after Hiroo arrived, Lubang Island was overtaken by Allied troops; so Hiroo and his men went into hiding in the jungle. Once, when scavenging for food the following October, Hiroo and company found a leaflet from the local islanders saying, *"The war ended August 15<sup>th</sup>. Come down from the mountains!"* Assuming this was just an elaborate ploy by Allied troops, Hiroo and his men went deeper into hiding.

The war had indeed ended. The Axis powers had surrendered and the world was changed. But not for those few soldiers hiding in the jungle. In their minds, the war was still on. The fight was far from over. They weren't going to fall for a lie. But the farmers on Lubang Island were tired of having their livestock raided by hungry hiding soldiers, so they got a Boeing B-17 to drop leaflets all over the jungle. Printed on these leaflets was the order to surrender from the Japanese general himself. That didn't work. So more leaflets were dropped with newspapers from Japan and photographs and letters from the soldiers' own families. Still nothing. Convinced the war was still raging, Hiroo and his men went deeper into hiding. Of Hiroo's three companions, one secretly surrendered and two were killed, leaving Hiroo all by himself, believing that the war was still on and he was in danger. In his mind, there was no possibility of peace. An amazing story, right? How could he not believe the proof that was literally dropped right on his head? Trusting no one, he kept trudging along for all those years – alone, afraid, and unsure about absolutely everything.

That same sense of misguided fear and distrust seems to be how Jesus' disciples felt on Easter Sunday night. They had witnessed the death of their Master and it seemed like they were the next to go. In their minds, the war was anything but over and done. But when Jesus appeared to them, he assured them that he brought peace. Not only did Jesus give peace, but he sent them to share that peace with others. **On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.** Peace was a foreign concept in the minds of Jesus' disciples. They had ridden the roller coaster of emotions during the previous week. They experienced the elation of Palm Sunday when Jesus was hailed as a king. Their hearts were warmed as Jesus demonstrated humble service by washing their feet. Their souls were fed by the body and blood Jesus in the Lord's Supper. Then Friday came. The disciples experienced horror, fear, and their hopes dissolved and their peace destroyed. Jesus, their trusted General, had been executed. Now they were left to fight for themselves...or so they thought.

But then...Jesus showed up. **"Peace be with you."** Simple words, but words with profound and eternal meaning. This was not simply a traditional Jewish greeting: *"Shalom."* This word of peace from the mouth of the risen Christ gave the peace it promised. Jesus brought them peace in their turmoil and proof in their doubt. *"Look at my hands and my side. See the wounds I endured to pay for your sin. Look at me and see that I've risen from the dead, just as I promised you."* Jesus brought peace to the disciples in that locked room, and did they need it! The reports about the empty tomb had been rolling in all day. The women were in hysterics, saying they had seen the Lord. Peter and John saw an empty tomb and believed what they saw, but they still didn't quite grasp all that meant. The disciples from Emmaus had walked and talked with Jesus earlier that evening and their hearts were burning within them. And now, that same Jesus stood in a locked room with his fearful followers, bringing peace. The reports they had heard were true, Jesus is alive!



But one of the disciples was absent on that first Easter night: Thomas. How did he react when his fellow disciples told him about Jesus' appearance? **"Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."** Thomas knew what Jesus promised; that he would suffer, die, and rise from the dead. But he hadn't seen the risen Christ, so Thomas remained skeptical. But instead of chastising Thomas for his doubts, Jesus once again came to the disciples one week later. **Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"** Did you catch that little phrase – "though the doors were locked"? This is a full week after Jesus first appeared to his disciples, and here they are again, huddled in a locked room, most likely still fearing the worst. They were convinced they were still fighting a war that had already been won. They had seen Jesus; touched him with their hands; watched him eat, but they still huddled together in fear. Why wouldn't they see the peace that Jesus brings with his resurrection? Is the risen Jesus simply too good to be true? Why were the disciples living like Jesus hadn't risen from the dead, even though he had? Why do we?

What about you? Here we are, a full week removed from our own Easter celebration. The brown sugar bacon is waiting in the wings for another year. The little eggs from the egg hunt are making their way back up to the attic. Do the "not-so-spectacular" days of life put a damper on the powerful truth of Christ's resurrection? Am I tempted to live like Jesus hasn't risen from the dead – to keep fighting a war that's already been won? What is it for you – something you know that Jesus has defeated with his resurrection – but something that still causes you to huddle in fear behind locked doors? Maybe it's guilt from the past; a head full of bad memories and an earful of accusations from the devil. Perhaps it's the opposite of the past. *How am I going to pay that? How will my marriage survive? How can I keep going?* We get so worked up and worried about the future that we forget what Christ's resurrection means for us – peace. We are not stranded soldiers still fighting a war that's been lost. We are more than conquerors through him who loved us. When the world around us wants to call our faith foolish and unreasonable, and when our sinful natures try to convince us we're trapped in a battle we can't win – we remember that Jesus brings peace. **Peace be with you.** And he's not merely talking about having a positive outlook for the future. Jesus IS our peace. He removed everything that stood between us sinners and a holy God, washing us pure and spotless from every stain of sin. We're not God's enemies...we're God's children! Talk about peace! You matter to the only one whose opinion really matters and Jesus made sure of it! You have peace in the most profound way; in the most eternal way.

For Hiroo Onoda, peace didn't come on VJ day. Instead, he kept fighting a war that had already been decided. Finally, in 1974, a travelling college student found Hiroo and could only convince him that the war was over by bringing his former commanding officer to tell him it was done. Can you imagine how Hiroo felt? Frustrated, I'd imagine. Perhaps angry at first, but after the shock wore off, relieved that the war was over, and there was peace.

This is how Jesus assured his disciples, and especially Thomas, that he brought peace. He came to them and gave them living, breathing proof of the peace they needed. Listen to how Jesus reassured Thomas, **"Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."** What grace he shows. He doesn't knock Thomas upside the head, he doesn't grab him and try to shake sense into him. Instead, Jesus met Thomas where he was at and gave him proof and peace in the face of his doubt. And grace upon grace, he does the same thing for you and me. Thomas, called Didymus, traditionally is thought to be a twin. His twin isn't mentioned in the gospels, but maybe it's me in this regard. Sometimes, it's astonishing how many times I can be reminded of the glorious truth of the resurrection and my heart still gives way to doubt. But just like he did with Thomas, gently, faithfully, consistently, Jesus points you and me directly to the places where he promises always to be found: fulfilling every promise of his word, at the font where he signed your adoption papers and made you his



child, at the altar where he feeds you over and over again with his body and blood to give you proof and peace of his living, breathing love for you.

The peace Jesus had brought through his resurrection didn't stay behind locked doors in Jerusalem. It was the disciples' to share, and it's ours to share. Jesus told them, **"As the Father has sent me, I am sending you...Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."** Jesus handed over the keys to heaven itself, giving his people the power to extend to others the peace he brings with his resurrection. You and I have been declared not guilty of sin, forgiven, justified before God and all of that for Jesus' sake. That message of full and free forgiveness brings us peace. We carry out that commission from Jesus regularly in our worship services. *As a called servant of Christ and by his authority, I forgive you all your sins.* With the risen Christ's power behind that word of forgiveness, we can be sure that it is just as valid as if Christ himself spoke it. We carry out that commission from Jesus when we extend the only peace that matters to a friend who confides in us, *Jesus died and rose to forgive that sin, too.* We have peace. And now we get to give peace to a world that so desperately needs it.

But what happens when we run into someone who thinks it's simply too good to be true? What about the person who wants proof? What about when I come face to face with doubt? Look where the gospel writer John points. **Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in his name.** While we don't have every word and action of Jesus recorded for us in Holy Scripture, we do have what the Holy Spirit wanted us to have. What we have is the message of forgiveness through Jesus; the assurance of a life forever in heaven; and peace that surpasses all understanding. The peace of Christ's resurrection didn't end that first Easter Sunday. It's the peace we live in every day of our lives. Jesus lives. Because he lives we, too, shall live. This is the peace that Jesus brings. This is the peace that is ours to share. Peace be with you!

Amen

*And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*

*(Philippians 4:7)*