



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.

## *Christ's Peace Drives Away Doubt*



*How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!*

*(1 John 3:1)*

“I could be at peace if...” How would you finish that sentence? “I could be at peace if...” There are as many answers to that fill in the blank as there are people in this room. And even more, in fact, because I’m sure that each of us would probably be able to fill that blank with at least a couple (if not a thousand) things that rob us of peace in our hearts. Depression and anxiety percentages in our country and world are staggering – in every age group from adolescents to the elderly. Peace seems to be an entirely elusive, ethereal impossibility. But we still try, don’t we? I could be at peace if I felt a little more secure for the future. I could be at peace if that person in my life would stop being so bull-headed and be loving instead. I could be at peace if my family knew how hard I’m trying. I could be at peace if my spouse seemed to care a little more. I could be at peace if I could forget the past and just move on. I could be at peace if I saw some noticeable improvement in my life. I could stand here and talk until I’m blue in the face, and maybe never even get close to what you’re thinking would finally bring you peace, but I suppose that kind of proves the point. There’s no shortage of stressors in our lives that keep us from being at peace. Soon enough, those stressors give way to doubt and fear – not just about ourselves and our future, but about our God. Peace seems to escape us at every turn. But did you ever think that maybe we’re looking for peace in all the wrong places?

Agitated, anxious, doubting, and despairing – those are just a few of the adjectives I would use to describe the disciples of Jesus on the evening of the very first Easter Sunday. During the previous week, they had been on an emotional rollercoaster. From the triumph of Palm Sunday, to the heart warming evening of Maundy Thursday, to the agony of Good Friday, to the depression of Holy Saturday – the disciples were anywhere but at peace. Sure, the reports about the empty tomb had been cascading in all day. The women were in hysterics, saying they had seen the Lord. Peter and John themselves had seen the empty tomb and believed what they saw, but they still didn’t grasp all that meant. Those disciples from Emmaus had walked and talked with Jesus himself, and their hearts were burning within them. But what did it all mean? How could the disciples go on? Each of them – not just Peter or Judas – each of them had abandoned Jesus in his hour of deepest need. And so, when peace seemed most elusive, the disciples did what comes naturally, and still happens today. They hid. They isolated themselves. They crouched among the ruins of their grand plans and promises of loyalty and faithfulness to Jesus – anxious, alone, and afraid. But then Jesus showed up.

**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!”** While the disciples were engaged in a fruitless exercise of introspective naval gazing, wondering what they could’ve done differently, wondering what they should do now, Jesus barged in on them and gave them what they could never find in themselves or in their efforts and intentions for the future. **Peace be with you!** Jesus said. *Shalom!* This isn’t just a “Hebrew Hello.” When Jewish people used that word *Shalom* (peace) it carried with it the understanding that everything was as it should be – no war, no crime, no disease, no sin – in other words, just like God created the world – in perfect harmony with him. Jesus brings peace to his troubled disciples – not just a pleasant thought for the future (“*Hey, things might get better!*”) – but a promise that the barrier of sin that stood between them and a holy God had been removed. Into their fog and fear, Jesus brings news that because he lives, peace with God is a true, present reality! Jesus barged through those locked doors because he loved his disciples too much to let them keep going, trying to find peace and security in all the wrong places. Those locked doors that shut them in and those thoughts of replaying the previous 72 hours wouldn’t bring them peace – only Jesus could. Only Jesus did.



In his grace, Jesus does the very same thing for you and me. If you're like me, you've never been hiding out behind locked doors in Jerusalem. But don't we build and bolt big locked doors around ourselves to try to provide ourselves with a sense of security? Maybe it's our rainy-day fund or our family time or our steady job – but how are your self-made security systems functioning...and failing? We think that if we can get enough of this, or keep out enough of that; once we can get things in our lives “just so,” then we'll finally have peace. But those doors we build around ourselves never provide the peace and security we think they will. Money comes and goes and, sadly, sometimes so does family. Jobs are gained and lost. Improvement in my life, whether advancement in career, or supposed advancement in my Christian living can all too easily come crashing down with a single setback or sin. If I'm trying to find God's peace by searching somewhere within myself or by looking at the work of my hands, I'm doomed. Then I'm standing side by side with those despairing disciples, looking so intently at myself that I miss the living, breathing Jesus who's standing right in front of me. But Jesus loves you too much to let you keep trying to find peace in all the wrong places.

With his resurrection, Jesus barges through our self-made doors that we think provide us peace and security, but don't. He gives us what we most desperately need, but have only failed to find on our own – peace; true, lasting, blood bought peace with God. The peace of Easter is the peace to know that because Jesus lives, the holy God is not an angry ogre waiting to squash you into hell forever – because Jesus has paid the debt of your sin. The peace of Easter is to know that because Jesus lives, you don't have to be afraid of that day when it's you who's lying in the casket – because Jesus has defeated your death with his resurrection. **Because I live, you also will live.** The peace of Easter is to know that the anxiety and the worry and the fear that drain joy from your life, peace from your heart, and sleep from your eyes – to know that all of those pressing concerns that seem to smack you in the face as soon as you wake up aren't the final word. Instead, with his resurrection, Jesus promises, **Peace be with you!** The peace of Easter is to know that Jesus lives, and he is alive for me – not by my own powers of reasoning, but by a gift of his Holy Spirit. The disciples learned this truth in a very pointed way – Jesus is alive!

But not all the disciples were present on that first Easter evening. Thomas missed out, and even though his fellow disciples tried to tell him, **“We have seen the Lord!”** Thomas wasn't having it. **“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.”** But then, Jesus shows up. And what do you suppose he has to say? **Peace be with you!** What grace he shows. He doesn't slap Thomas upside the head; he doesn't grab Thomas by the shoulders and try to shake some sense into him. Instead, Jesus meets Thomas where he's at, and gives him every ounce of proof and peace he could ever want. And he does the same thing for you and me. Do you want proof of Jesus' resurrection? Wouldn't you like a little certainty about this promise of peace? If you answered, “Yes,” then notice very carefully what Jesus does to give that proof and peace. Jesus doesn't point Thomas to Thomas. Jesus points Thomas to Jesus. If Thomas looked to himself, he'd see only his doubt, only his failure, only his despair. Blinded by his doubt and skepticism, Thomas got to read like Braille the love of God, as his fingers passed in, over, and around the wounds that paid his redemption price. With Thomas, don't look to yourself for peace, proof, and assurance. Instead, with Thomas, rest in the wounds of Jesus, your Savior. Look where Jesus has promised to be found – in the waters of your baptism where he promises that you are his own; in the bread and wine of his Supper, where he promises that he has paid for your sin in full; in the word of the gospel, where he promises, **If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven.** If you're looking for proof, peace, and assurance, listen again to Jesus' **“It is finished!”** because he meant it.



This is Christ's promise – a peace that passes all understanding. But don't look for it in all the wrong places. You may never get a promotion at work; you probably won't become independently wealthy overnight; your marriage may still be tough, your family may remain dysfunctional, and your life may seem to be a string of failures to grow and progress as you'd like. But does that mean that Christ's peace isn't real? Hardly. A good job, a loving marriage, financial stability are all well and good, but too many look to those things to determine if God's making good on his promises or – even worse - if I'm doing enough of my part to bring about these blessings of God in my life. It seems logical, but it's a trick of the devil. It would seem to make sense to human understanding, but the peace of Christ is the peace that **surpasses all understanding**. It's the peace of knowing that no matter how peppered with unfaithfulness your track record is, God will never break his promise of faithfulness to you. It's the peace to hear God's guarantee that the mountain of your sin is dwarfed and completely covered by the mountain of his grace. The peace that passes all understanding sees even the challenges of this life as not worth comparing to the glory that is ours because of our Savior Jesus. So, you see, true peace isn't found in me or in my situation. It's found only in God's promises to me in Christ.

When I read the gospel lesson for today, did it sound a bit repetitious? Three times in the span of maybe six sentences, Jesus says the exact same thing: **Peace be with you!** Why? Because he means it, and probably, because he knows just how prone we are to forgetting it – especially when things in our lives don't seem so peaceful. Imagine if a husband said "I love you" to his wife on their wedding day and then thought, "I'm good. I said it. She should remember that for the next 50 years" and then proceeded to never tell her "I love you" again. We'd say, "How foolish!" Thank God that's not how he works. Instead of making us cast about in the world looking for peace, God attaches the peace of Easter to his Word and Sacraments. In the good news of his gospel, we hear our loving Father's eternal refrain, "I love you. I have forgiven your sin. I have defeated your death. My peace is yours!" "I could be at peace if..." Easter provides the only answer to that dilemma. "I AM at peace with God through my Savior, Jesus Christ." This is his power, this is his promise – **Peace be with you!**

Amen

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

*(Philippians 4:7)*