

Peace Be With You

John 20:19-31

The Second Sunday of Easter, April 12, 2015

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

The disciples deserted Jesus when Judas came and betrayed Him. The disciples saw Judas coming with a cohort of soldiers. The soldiers had spears and clubs and lanterns. They came to arrest Jesus. Judas was there to identify Jesus to them. Judas was there to lead them to the place where he knew Jesus and the disciples would be. When Judas came with the soldiers the disciples panicked and fled. They left Jesus alone to be betrayed. They left Jesus alone.

They could have stood and fought. They may not have prevented the arrest of our Lord, but they could have at least shown to their Lord that they were loyal to Him. They could have shown how much they loved Him. Here He was giving His life for them. Surely they could have done the same for Him. Or perhaps they could have prevented His arrest. Perhaps they could have been cunning. They had some swords on them. Perhaps they could have killed Judas and maybe a couple of soldiers. If they had done it with stealth perhaps they could have sent the whole cohort into a panic. The disciple would have proven their loyalty to their Lord that way. But we will not know whether or not the disciples could have saved their Lord because they did not even try. When Judas came with the soldiers, they panicked and fled. They left Jesus all alone to be arrested to a certain death.

And that was the result of their cowardice. Jesus died. It wasn't like they fled and left Jesus to be arrested and He was held for questioning and then released. It was that they fled, Jesus was arrested, and put to death by crucifixion. They were cowards and Jesus died because of it.

And now this same Jesus is risen from the dead! He has power over life and death. He has power that the creation has never seen before. It is the power of resurrection. It is power to make alive and if it is power to make alive it is also power to put to death. Jesus has the keys of death and of hell. He has the power to execute judgment on all of His enemies. He has power over the fate of the entire creation. He decides its fate.

And so this risen from the dead, almighty, glorious, avenging, Jesus appears to the disciples who had been cowards, who had left Him to die in the hands of the betrayer and those with him and they are afraid. What is this risen from the dead Jesus going to do to those poor cowards?

He shows them His hands and His feet and says, "Peace be with you."

Peter was the worst of them all. Peter was not simply a coward the night that our Lord was arrested. He was a hypocrite as well. Jesus had predicted that the disciples would abandon Him. He had told them at the Passover meal that night exactly what they would do. Peter denied that he would ever abandon his Lord. He told the Lord, "Even if all others abandon You, I will not." And then Peter made His boldest claim of all, "Even if I have to die with You, I will never leave You."

Peter had made his promise, but he did not keep it. He abandoned his Lord along with the rest of the disciples. He was a coward, but he was worse than a coward. He had promised not to be coward and he was one anyway. Peter was a hypocrite which is just another word for a liar.

Then Peter's hypocrisy gets worse. Perhaps Peter's conscience was bothering him. He did follow Jesus to the home of the chief priest, Caiaphas. Peter must have followed at some distance behind the soldiers who had arrested Jesus. They did not notice him following them. Peter made it into the courtyard of the chief priest's home. Jesus was inside the house being put to trial which would lead to His death. Even though Peter was at the home of the chief priest he did not go into the house to render testimony in

defense of Jesus. He did not try to free Jesus from the house of the high priest. He did nothing but stay out in the courtyard. So Peter following Jesus to the home of the chief priest did Jesus no good.

And then Peter is out in the court and people begin to notice him. They notice that he is a Galilean and ask him if he is a disciple of Jesus. Here is Peter's big chance to stand up for his Lord. Here is Peter's big chance to die with his Lord just as he had promised. Here was Peter's big chance to show everyone what he was made of. But he was a coward and denied that he even knew Jesus. When the people in the courtyard pressed him on the issue he called a curse down upon himself and took an oath that he did not know Jesus at all. That means that Peter swore before God that he did not know Jesus. He said that if he did know Jesus may God damn Peter to hell. That is what Peter said and then he ran away. The Lord received no help from Peter that night. The Lord died because of it.

And now the risen Lord is standing in front of Peter. The risen Lord has the keys of death and of hell. The risen Lord has authority from God the Father to judge everyone on the earth. Peter had sworn to go to hell if he knew Jesus and now Jesus has the power to send him there and if Jesus did Jesus would be sending Peter to hell on Peter's own word, his own curse.

And what does Jesus do with Peter? He shows Peter His hands and His feet and says, "Peace be with you."

Thomas is faithless toward the risen Lord.

The other disciples tell Thomas, "We have seen the Lord." He does not believe them. Even though his Lord had told him time and time again that He would rise from the dead, even though Thomas had seen countless examples of the Lord doing the impossible with the word from His mouth. He had seen the Lord predict the impossible and it come to pass. He had seen the Lord command the impossible and it happened. He had seen the Lord raise other people from the dead. In spite of all of this when the other disciples report to him that the Lord's word had been fulfilled and that He had risen from the dead, Thomas, the big modernist, would not believe the word of the Lord unless he had some evidence to back it up. Thomas did not merely doubt the word of the Lord, Thomas was an unbeliever. We all think we know what Jesus does to a bunch of unbelievers.

And what does Jesus do with this unbelieving Thomas? He shows up and says, "Peace be with you." He shows Thomas His hands and side. He beckons Thomas to examine the evidence of His crucifixion and resurrection. He rebukes Thomas for his unbelief, but then grants him those things necessary in order for him to believe. Jesus pronounces His blessing on those who have not seen and yet have believed. But that does not remove the peace that the Lord granted to Thomas.

Jesus sends the disciples out with His word. He says that as the Father has sent Him even so He is sending them. He sends them out to deliver His word. He sends them out with the Holy Spirit. And the word that He sends them to deliver is the word of forgiveness from the heavenly Father. If they forgive anyone his sins, that person stands forgiven in the eyes of God. If they do not forgive someone their sins, the person is not forgiven in the eyes of God. Jesus sends them in the same way that the Father sent Him. The Father sent Him with authority to forgive sins. Jesus sends them with the authority to forgive sins. They go out delivering the message to as many as will hear them that sins are forgiven in the eyes of God. In their proclamation they show people the hands and the feet and the side of Jesus. They show that the price for forgiveness has been paid. Atonement has been made. In their proclamation they show people the risen Jesus Christ and deliver that eternal message from Jesus, "Peace be with you."

And so peace has come down to you. The message of the apostles has come also to you. The message of the crucified and risen Lord has come also to you. Everything is accomplished. Everything is completed. Your sins are all forgiven. And if that message has come to you it is because the Father sent the Son who sent the messenger who has told you that your sins are forgiven. Therefore they are forgiven in the eyes of God. He says, "Peace be with you."

And we need that peace.

We need that peace for the times when we betray our Lord. We need that peace for the times when we should stand up for what is right and we do not because we are afraid. We are afraid of ridicule. We are afraid of the friends that we will lose if we stand up for what is right. We fear the scorn of others. We fear doing something different than how we were raised. We fear all of these things. We fear these things in spite of the fact that our Lord faced and suffered far worse scorn on our behalf. He was willing to be crucified for us and we are unwilling to face a little ridicule or a little scorn on behalf of Him?

We need that peace when we chose the things of this world over the things of God. So often we are presented with a choice that has to do with money. Do we chose money or do we choose the Lord? Do we choose what will advance our money or keep our money over a choice that would honor the Lord? Do we choose what will advance or honor our work or school over the Lord? And when we choose money, or work, or school or a school activity over the Lord do we really think that the Lord does not see? Do we really think that the Lord does not notice? He made us His number one priority giving His very life for us and we cannot sacrifice a sport, a school event, a work related event, some money for Him?

There are those times in our life when we could share the peace of God with another and we do not. We tell people that we will pray for them, but it never occurs to us that we could have prayed with them. And how much more comfort would it have brought to the person had we prayed with them! We could have visited the sick and the dying, but we were too busy. We were too afraid that if we went and visited the sick and the dying that it would be too much for us to handle. We told ourselves that we would prefer to remember them as they were and not as they have become while sick and dying and we left them to be sick alone. We left them to die alone. We could have done something to alleviate their suffering simply by letting them know that they were not alone, but we were more concerned for ourselves than we were for them. We were more concerned about the little things in life than we were about the important things in life.

There are those times when we could have offered a word of forgiveness or a word of rebuke to someone to whom God has called us to serve. There were those times when we could have conveyed to our children the blessings of sins forgiven, but we did not. We were so concerned that their behavior was a poor reflection on how we raised them that we disciplined them without any mercy. We were so concerned that they would bring harm to themselves or others that we could not see that our own lack of mercy toward them was driving their behavior. We never told them that we forgive them. We never told them that we loved them. And because of that our children believe that God is nothing more than a dictator in heaven who demands that certain things be done in order to be saved. They know nothing of the mercy and grace of God. They know nothing of His peace. And this is only the example of our children. What about our neighbors and our friends?

We have betrayed the Lord. We have come to the Divine Service and told Him that we believe in Him and it was a lie. We are hypocrites and because we are hypocrites we are liars.

What would the Lord of the universe who has the power over life and death in all of the creation and will judge all of the creation say if He were to meet us? What would He do to us? Well, the risen Lord would show you His hands and His side and He would say, "Peace be with you."

In spite of your denials, in spite of your weakness, in spite of yours selfishness and cowardice He says, "Peace be with you." And He shows His hands and His side.

And we face life and death.

We face life and death. We face the end of life decisions that have to be made for one who is close to us. Some of us are powers of attorney for our parents' health. What happens when the end of life comes? What decisions do we make for mom and dad?

We face our own deaths. We face a diagnosis of cancer and series of treatments and surgeries of which we do not know the end. We do not know whether or not they will work. We do not know whether or not they will be successful. They may be successful in the short term. Will they be successful in the long term? Will the surgery cure me or kill me? What decisions should I make about my own end of life? Shall I have a living will? What shall the living will say?

Most of the rest of us live without terminal diagnoses like these, but we are just as terminal as they are. We are all hurtling toward death and there is nothing to stop it. We wish to live into our nineties, but what would living into our nineties mean except a lot more time to contemplate how old we are and how close to death we have become.

And death is irreversible. People die and we do not talk to them anymore. People die and we do not see them anymore. We go to their gravestones and we try to talk to them, but they do not answer us back. We don't play cards or watch TV with them anymore. We don't see them at Christmas and at Easter anymore.

And what to do in the face of death?

Nothing really. What can we do in the face of death? We are sinners and we have brought this death upon ourselves. We knew it would happen sooner or later. We just didn't know about the sooner or later part.

We need a word from the One who rose from the dead. We need a word from the One who faced what we are facing and overcame it. We need a word from the One who died and was even buried, but came back. We need a word from Him because He has the power over what we are facing. He has the power over our death. He has power over all death. He judges the living and the dead. He has the keys of death and hell. We poor mortals implore Him for help.

And He has come to you. He has shown you His hands and His feet. And He has told you mortals His message, "Your sins are forgiven. I give to you your own resurrection from the dead. You will return as I have. Peace be with you."

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.