**Faith, Peace, and Forgiveness**

Based on [John 20:19-31](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Jn20.19-31)

Preached on April 8, 2018

Second Sunday of Easter ~ Quasimodo Geniti

Pastor Nathan Fuehrer

This Gospel is about two post-resurrection appearances of Jesus to his disciples. The first happened on Easter evening when all the disciples, except Thomas, were gathered together in a locked room. On this occasion Jesus instituted what we call “the office of the keys,” and also “the office of the Holy Ministry.” Eight days later Thomas was with them, and Christ appeared to him as well. On that occasion, Jesus taught Thomas the doctrine of salvation by faith…“blessed are those who have not seen, and have yet believed.” We will consider the case of Thomas first, and Jesus’ teaching of salvation by faith.

Scripture says that “faith” is “the assurance of things not seen**.” If anyone would accuse you of having “blind faith” in Jesus, it’s kind of like accusing you of drinking “wet water”, or of walking on “cold ice.”** All ice is cold, all water is wet, and all faith is blind to some degree. And all people, religious or not, to some extent, believe in things they don’t see.

Now, you can have *misplaced* faith. You can have *irresponsible* or *irrational* faith. You can have faith that has no factual basis at all. Not all faith is *equally* blind. **But, properly speaking, you cannot have faith in what you can clearly see before you.** After all, Scripture teaches that in heaven, no one will have faith because believers, who once saw dimly by as through a mirror (that is, through faith), will then see God face to face (1 Cor. 13).

In this sense, these eleven disciples did not have “faith” in the resurrection of Jesus…because they saw it. Their belief was not based on trusting someone else’s words but on trusting what they saw in front of them. Incidentally, this is why the subsequent martyrdom of these apostles is such a convincing witness for our faith. Lots of people have died to promote false religions and creeds--Muslims suicide bombers for example. But they died for what they only believed by faith, their death was blind. But because the apostles saw Jesus alive with their own eyes and were willing to die for it, it is because they heard him and touched him and died for what they experienced first-hand that our faith has a basis in fact.

Thomas did not have faith in the resurrection. The other disciples had seen Jesus alive and told Thomas. But Thomas refused to trust their words. He refused to believe Jesus was alive until he could see Jesus alive. He resisted the Holy Spirit, who works through the Word alone. He resisted the word of his brothers who saw him, resisted the word of Jesus who had predicted many times that he would rise. He refused to trust God’s Word and tested God by demanding proof.

Eight days later, Jesus appears again to the disciples, this time with Thomas present, and he invites him to touch his hands and his side. Then Thomas believes. Jesus says to him, “**Do you believe because you have seen me, *blessed are those who have not seen, and have yet believed****.*” In other words, “You believe I’m alive without faith, blessed are those who believe it by faith.”

Jesus was talking about us. We believe, not because of what we have seen, but because of what Thomas and the eleven had seen. We believe by faith in what the apostles saw. And through believing what we have heard from them, but not seen, we are saved. Jesus here teaches salvation by faith.

Now, someone might say, “**If the apostles didn’t believe in the resurrection by faith, then they must not be saved—because all who are saved are saved by faith.**” The answer is this: the apostles were saved by faith, *but not by blind faith in the resurrection*. Believing in the resurrection alone is not what saves. Even the demons believe and shudder (James 2:19). Even the devil believes that Christ rose from the dead, but he remains hostile to God and condemned.

Faith is not believing a few facts about God, but a continuing dependence upon and trust in His promises. The apostles would have many more opportunities to exercise and show their faith in things promised but not seen. For instance, t**hese apostles had not yet seen the room in heaven Christ promised to prepare for them.** They would have to believe it was there by faith. And they would have to believe it after he ascends to heaven leaving them to still live in a world of sin. They would face martyrdom and be tempted to deny Christ and embrace sin. And in facing these things reliance upon the Christ’s words—“faith”—will be required to believe that God has brought victory and peace through the resurrection of Christ.

On the first Easter Evening, the disciples had apparently lost faith to some degree. Christ had died, and they had seen the empty tomb and even heard reports that he was alive. Yet they locked themselves in a room for fear of the Jews. Christ had taught them when he was with them, “**Fear not the one who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul, fear the one who can kill both body and soul in hell.**” Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, but fear of the Jews is idolatry. The disciples should have feared Jesus who can destroy body and soul in hell. They had all abandoned him when he was arrested. Peter had denied him three times, and he knew Jesus saw his denial. They had been unfaithful. They feared the ones who killed Jesus, exposing their doubt in his resurrection victory.

But on account of Jesus’ blood, God approaches all sinners with a message of peace. When Jesus came to them through locked doors, his first words to them were, “**Peace be with you**.” Not anger, condemnation or judgment for their failure; only peace, because Jesus had made peace for them by the blood of his cross (Col. 1:20).

This peace from God is offered not only to his apostles and disciples, but to all for whom he died. Jesus offers peace to all people, all nations, tongues and tribes. He offered it to his apostles personally on Easter evening, now that he is ascended he offers it through an office or vocation in his Church. It is the power of the keys, entrusted to the office of the holy ministry,. And both the keys and the ministry he instituted that very night.

Earlier though, while Jesus was still with then, he had sent apostles out two by two into every town where he was about to go. **And he told them that Whatever house they enter, first say, Peace be unto this house!** And if a son of peace is there your peace will rest upon him, but if not it will return to you. And if anyone would not receive their peace, they were to leave that town and kick the dust off their feet as a judgment against them.

Jesus instituted “The office of the Holy Ministry” with these words, “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you” And when he had said this he breathed on them and said to them “**Receive the Holy Spirit.”** The one called to minister on Christ’s behalf has been promised the Holy Spirit to do so, as is instituted here by Christ, and attested to by many other scriptural proofs (cf: Acts 20:28, 1 Timothy 4:14, 2 Timothy 1:6). All believers have the Holy Spirit, but not all have the spiritual gift of the Holy Ministry. That is reserved for those men who are chosen by Christ and promised his Spirit for ministry.

And so what have ministers been given the Holy Spirit to do? Forgive and retain sin. While he was still with them, Jesus promised, “**I will give you the *keys* to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.**” Now that he is risen and will ascend to his Father, he institutes the keys he promised with these words, “if you forgive anyone their sins, they are forgiven them, if you retain them, they are retained.” How are they to administer this forgiveness, based on repentance, that is, the reception of the Gospel of peace.

And this is the ministry today, it is why churches form and call pastors. First to proclaim to the whole world, “Peace be with you.” **Then they are to forgive and retain sins based on the reaction to this news. Those who reject this news of peace, despise Christ and his messengers and refuse to repent, remain in their sins.** Their sins are not to be forgiven for they have denied the master who bought them, and they react with hostility to the message of peace. Those who receive this news with faith in Christ, renouncing their sins in repentance and turning to him for salvation, they are forgiven by Christ through his minister.

To recap, today’s gospel teaches three doctrines. First salvation comes through faith not sight. Blessed are those who have not seen and have yet believed what God has promised us in Jesus Christ. **Second, Jesus has this message for all people “Peace be with you.” Although he is ascended, he preaches his peace even today through the office of the holy ministry, the called and ordained servants of Christ. All believers are to confess the Gospel, but not all are called to do so publically on behalf of the church. Not all are apostles, not all are evangelists, not all are administrators, but the spirit gives gifts according to his choosing, and he promises the gift of the Holy Spirit’s to those who are rightly called to minister.** Third, Jesus gives the authority of the keys to forgive and retain sins to men on earth, to withhold forgiveness for those who reject his peace and remain in their sin, but to forgive as many of you as believe his message of peace and repent.