**Peace with God**

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

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Second Sunday of Easter

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Today’s gospel lesson contains three central teachings for our consideration this week. First, Jesus’ death and resurrection brings peace. Second, Jesus gives his church the authority to forgive sins. Third, salvation comes by faith which is a belief in things not seen.

First, Jesus’ death and resurrection cross brings peace.

On the first Christmas morning, the angels sang to the shepherds of peace on earth because of the birth of Jesus. Elsewhere Jesus himself says, “**Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid**” (John 14:27).

The peace that the world gives is money, savings, job security, and pension. It is streets safe from crime, firefighters, paramedics. It is a standing army to protect our borders and good relationships between nations of the world. The peace that the world gives is heath care; doctors, medications and treatments, psychiatry, social programs. It is goods and services; it is supermarkets with food always on the shelves; department stores with household appliances, personal hygiene supplies, affordable clothing and everything else. Hardware stores, restaurants, hotels, gas stations. It is jobs, jobs, jobs. It is high wages and low prices. The world doesn’t always deliver, but these are the things that the world would have you sacrifice to obtain, to trust in to have peace on earth.

Jesus says, “**My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid**.” Jesus doesn’t promise peace through jobs, convenience, safety, health, wealth or any of these things. On the contrary, the peace that he gives frees your heart from anxiety over these things. The peace that the world gives is temporary, moth and rust will decay it; it will pass away. And even if it doesn’t pass away in your lifetime, you will pass away and eventually lose it all. The worlds provisions for peace will pass away, but God could require your soul this very night, and for that the world offers no peace.

The peace that Jesus leaves with you is peace in death. It is knowing that you could die at any moment and if that happens, you are ready. If you knew you were going to die today, what would cross your mind? Would you be thinking of all of the projects you have been working on and how they will not get done? **Will you regret how you spent your whole life scrimping and saving for some midlife pinnacle of living that you will never get to enjoy?** Will you think about seeing God face to face and whether you are prepared to meet him, to give an account of your deeds? If your soul was required of you this moment, would you be anxious, or would you be at peace?

On the evening of the Resurrection, the disciples huddled into a place and locked the doors because they were afraid. They were afraid of the Jews; they were afraid that they would be found, tried, and executed just as their master was a few days earlier. They were afraid to suffer and die at the hands of evil men. They were afraid of losing things of this world, losing the peace that the world gives.

Jesus had prepared his disciples for this fear of evil and how to deal with it. Before he sent them out into the world to proclaim the kingdom of heaven and face opposition, He had said to them, “**Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell**” (Matthew 10:28). Evil men can only kill the body. Sticks and stones. Evil people can threaten your job, take your money, beat up the body, slander your reputation. They are the ones who offer peace in this world precisely so they can take it away from you if you don’t obey *them*. But Jesus taught his disciples the prudence of obeying God and not men. After all, it is God and only God who can destroy both soul and body in hell. And it is only God who can overcome the world and give eternal peace.

These disciples, having heard Jesus’ teaching, should not have feared then the Jews, they should fear God. On Easter evening, Jesus gave them opportunity to do so. Though the doors were locked, Jesus enters the place where they were and came and stood among them. God came and stood among them.

For fear of the Jews, these same disciples abandoned Jesus and fell away from him as he was arrested and led away to the cross. For fear of the Jews Peter denied Jesus three times, and then remembered Jesus words and wept. And now for fear of the Jews they were huddled in a locked room, and in comes God in the flesh, the only one who deserves to be feared, which is the same thing as saying he is the only one who deserves to be worshipped.

Fear of the Jews is idolatry, and they were caught congregating according to such false worship. They were caught coveting the worldly peace that they had lost for befriending Jesus. And then that very same Jesus comes to them and says to them, “Peace be with you.” And he shows them in his hands and his side the things that make for peace. The Jews had killed his body, they had crucified the Lord of Glory, and by showing them his hands and his side proved to them what he had taught them all along, do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Jesus death and resurrection brings peace, because his wounds testify that the one who has authority to destroy both soul and body in hell raised Jesus body from the death he suffered at the hands of sinful men. There is no need to fear the Jews; there is no need to sell your soul to get along in this world of sin; because Christ has been raised from the dead, and he is the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. He gives you true peace. Just as nothing in this world can conquer him, not even death; so too nothing in the world can conquer those who are in him.

Second, Jesus gives his church the authority to forgive sins. Nothing in the world can conquer those who are in Jesus Christ. And who is in Jesus Christ? The one whose sins are forgiven by his blood. “By his wounds we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5). “Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered (Psalm 32:1).

On Easter Evening Jesus first gave his disciples the assurance of Peace with God through his death and resurrection. Then he equips them with the authority to do the same for the rest of the flock scattered throughout the world until the end of the age. “**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. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld**.”

This is called the power of the keys. Just as God has given the government the authority to punish criminals and protect the innocent; so too God has given the church the authority to forgive the faithful and to condemn the faithless. The government is to provide worldly peace; the church heavenly peace. The government is to protect the body; the church is to protect the soul. Each can abuse their authority and if so will have to answer to God for it; but every Christian and every person is subject to these authorities.

Jesus gives the Holy Spirit to pastors in order to forgive and retain sins; and this is so that the faithful can have peace from God. Someone might say, “I’m fine with having a pastor forgive my sins, but who is he to judge and say I’m not forgiven.” That’s like saying, “I’m fine with having the police protect me and my family from criminals; but who are they to arrest me if I’ve done something wrong?” God shows no partiality; neither should his representatives, but he has representatives who are called to give peace on earth. And the greatest peace is the forgiveness of sins because by it, you know that you are in Christ, and if you are in Christ, you can die in peace knowing that, Just as Jesus was raised from the dead, death will not rule over your life, but you will be raised just as he is, and have an eternal peace that the world cannot give.

Third, salvation comes by faith which is a belief in things not seen. The forgiveness of sins is something that cannot be seen; the peace of God that keeps your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus passes all understanding (Phil. 4:7). So Thomas, who wasn’t there at first to see Jesus raised from the dead did not believe until he saw the holy hands and pierced side of his savior. And he had no peace from faith until he did. Then he said, “My Lord and my God”

Thomas and the other apostles were blessed to see the wounds of Jesus with their own eyes. They saw all of it with their own eyes so that, by their witness of his death and resurrection, Christ would build his church on earth. But their blessing is not greater, for our consolation comes by faith in the words of Jesus. When the called and ordained minister of Christ says in the stead and by the command of Christ, “your sins are forgiven”, you are to believe it by faith in the words of Jesus, who says to Thomas, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have yet believed.” In other words, Blessed are those who have only heard, and have yet believed.

Also, blessed are those who have tasted and believed. We receive Jesus’ body and blood for forgiveness, under bread and wine, not because we see his body and blood, but because we believe these elements are what he says they are. This is all accomplished through faith.

First, Jesus’ death and resurrection brings peace…peace which the world cannot give. Second, Jesus gives his church the authority to forgive sins, and this authority is to spread the peace of Christ until he comes again. Third, salvation comes by faith which is a belief in things not seen. Though peace is not seen in this life, it is as sure as Christ’s own resurrection from the grave.