

John 20:19-31
"The Voice of Peace"
Second Sunday of Easter

April 19, 2020
First Lutheran Church, Glencoe, Minn.
Pastor Peter Adelsen

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen!

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[Intro]

"Hey, Siri, call mom."

"Okay, Google, what's the weather forecast this weekend?"

"Alexa, set my alarm for 6:30 a.m."

The human voice has new power! Now we don't have to type with our thumbs anymore. We can talk to our devices and they will do what we ask. Or at least that is how it is supposed to work.

It's the sort of thing that was science fiction just years ago. At a time when most of the information that went into a computer was on punch cards, Star Trek's Captain Kirk and others on the USS Enterprise talked to a computer.

And now, we all can talk to the computer. We can dictate to our word-processing programs, we can surf the internet without touching a keyboard, we can call up a recipe in the kitchen without dirtying the tablet screen.

You see, God created voice to have power.

Easter is, among other things, about the power of voice. On this Second Sunday of Easter, the risen Lord Jesus comes to you and to me to speak His peace into our hearts so that we may speak that peace to the world.

[Speaking Peace in the Upper Room]

This is what we read in today's Gospel lesson. After Mary Magdalene and the other women told Christ's disciples they had seen the Lord, the disciples did not really believe.

By the evening of that very day, we find the disciples behind locked doors. That is, except for Thomas. Now, this wasn't just a simple padlock — the doors were barred. No one was getting in and no one was getting out.

Now, the disciples had good reason for their fear of the Jewish authorities. Long before Christ died upon the cross, the Sanhedrin had decreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah was to be expelled from the synagogues (John 9:22). Since that time, the Sanhedrin's hatred for Jesus also spilled over to the disciples. Now that the Sanhedrin succeeded in getting rid of Jesus, the disciples thought they were next.

So, here they are, hunkered down, huddled together, letting fear rather than faith control their every thought and action.

Then suddenly, Jesus comes and stands before them. Now, Jesus never knocked on the door asking to be let in. Jesus never snuck through a window. Jesus was simply — *there*. John tells us the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. But in their joy, not one of them apologizes for his behavior over the last few days.

No one says he's sorry or that they should have done better. Perhaps part of the reason is that they did not get a chance to say anything.

Instead, it's Jesus who speaks the first word, much like the Father who had the first word in the "Parable of the Prodigal Son," who hugged and kissed his lost son, before he could say a word.

And just as was the case at the sound of God's voice in creation, the sound of Jesus' voice creates something wonderful and new: "***Peace be with you,***" (John 20:19).

This is not a wish or a hope. It is His gift to them.

"Peace be with you," He says, and there is peace and joy.

This, the disciples could only begin to realize, was the whole point of what Jesus had just been through. Jesus' death on the cross was to reestablish the peace between God and man that had been shattered when we first sinned. Sin will always stand as separation, conflict, between two parties.

- In sin, we live for ourselves, not for each other.
- In sin, we cannot be in harmony, instead we are at odds.
- In sin, we could never be with God, because His holiness cannot be in relationship with unholiness.

But, by taking our sin to the cross, Christ removed the separation and reconciled us to God, bringing us back into peace with Him.

This whole scene repeats a week later when Thomas, at last, is with the disciples. The doors still being locked, Jesus simply appears. He speaks the same word: ***“Peace be with You.”***

Then, Jesus encourages Thomas to touch and see the wounds. He says: ***“Do not disbelieve, but believe”*** (John 20:27).

[Speaking Peace to Today’s Disciples]

Even though two thousand years have passed since that first Easter evening, the Church still struggles to get out from behind locked doors and into the world.

While we might not fear suffering the same cruelty as Jesus suffered on the cross — the fear that kept the first apostles locked up — there is as much to be wary of in the 21st century as there was in the first century.

How appropriate is our text that we find ourselves locked up in quarantine during this COVID-19 Pandemic? Instead of fearing the Jewish authorities, we fear the unknown of this novel virus.

Or, before COVID-19 was known, many of us were in fear of the culture around us as the Christian truth was being marginalized by the culture in order to achieve “social justice.”

The temptation is to focus all our attention on our fear and let that fear paralyze us. Our text from John 20 is not about how the world locks its doors to the Gospel, but how the Church locks itself away from the world.

The irony of the disciples’ locked doors is that they weren’t really keeping out soldiers looking to crucify them and they weren’t keeping out friends and relatives who may have wanted to ridicule them for following Jesus. The One they were looking for was Jesus.

They locked out the word Christ had so clearly spoken to them about dying and rising again, and in locking out that word, they locked out Jesus.

When fear becomes our focus, we fall into the same trap. We lock out the Lord, who time and time again tells His Church: ***“Do not be afraid!”***

Jesus will have none of it! The securely locked doors are no problem for Him. If the grave could not keep Him in the ground, their barred door would not keep Him outside the room where they were gathered. And so, He comes and stands among them and among us and speaks His word — a word that brings the very thing it says: ***“Peace be with you!”***

This is Jesus’ word to you this Second Sunday of Easter.

- ***“Peace be with you.”***
- ***“Peace, your sin is forgiven!”***
- ***“Do not fear the world. I have overcome the world. Peace be with you!”***

This word comes to you and me today, with exactly the same power as it came to those first disciples on the first Easter and to Thomas a week later.

“These [words] are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31).

In His Word, Jesus comes among us today, as we experience the power of His voice. He doesn’t just tell us about peace, but He actually speaks peace to you and me. As Martin Luther puts it, “As soon as He said it, it was done” (AE 12:32).

Just like on that first Easter evening, Jesus does not knock on our church doors asking to come in and Jesus does not sneak in through a window. He simply appears through His Means of Grace – *in remembering our Baptism, in hearing His Word rightly proclaimed, and in eating and drinking of His very Body and very Blood* – and we hear His peace saying ***“Peace be with you!”***

Jesus first spoke His peace to you and to me in the water of our Baptism, where we were joined to His death and resurrection and we died to sin and rose to new life.

That peace is spoken to you every time you return in repentance to your Baptism, and Christ says to us through Pastor Welch and myself: ***“As a called and ordained servant of Christ, and by His authority, I therefore forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”***

This same peace is spoken to you each time you come to His table, where – *in, with, and under the bread and wine* – He comes through space and time to feed you His very body and His very blood for the forgiveness of our sins and to lift us from our fears. There His voice speaks peace: ***“Take, eat. Take, drink. This is for you, for the forgiveness of your sins.”***

Then, we hear Christ speaking to us, as if to remove any doubts, *“The body and blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ strengthen and preserve you in body and soul to life everlasting. Depart in peace and joy.”*

During this time of social distancing, we are not all able to receive Christ’s true Body and true Blood. But, we can all take heart that by grace through faith in Jesus, we have received forgiveness of sins. But, when this pandemic is passed, let us all join together again at Christ’s table of grace!

We will all then rise together from the table of grace at peace.

[Peace that Passes all Understanding]

Jesus tells us: ***“As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you”*** (John 20:21). The Lord cannot be bound. His Word cannot be bound. His followers do not live behind locked doors — even during a quarantine. He sends us out into the world six-to-eight feet apart, or with a simple phone call, text message, video chat, not empty handed.

He breathes His Holy Spirit upon His disciples, and to us — His Church. So, like the first disciples, we are sent to the world to be the voice of peace. Our voices become voices of power, not because of our doing, but because through our voice, Jesus Himself speaks.

For Christians, we see peace differently than the unbelieving world around us. We know that enemies, sickness, poverty, sin, the devil, and death are still there. Yet, we have peace within, and strength and comfort in our hearts. We know that since Christ has conquered sin, death and Satan, by grace through faith in Jesus, we too have conquered our evil foes!

This is why the peace we have in Jesus passes all human understanding. Our peace passes and exceeds reason and all the senses.

We have peace, because although He died, He rose again to speak to us saying: ***“Peace be with you!”***

Long before there was a Siri, Alexa, or Google, there was the Risen Lord Jesus, speaking to us and through people like you and me, so that all who are locked behind doors of fear, sin, sickness, and even death itself might hear His word: ***“Peace be with you.”***

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.

✠ SOLI DEO GLORIA ✠