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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Second Sunday of Easter (Series B)

April 12, 2015

Text: John 20:19–31

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

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Today's text from John 20 is always read on the Second Sunday of Easter. And wow! What a text it is. Every Christian needs to hear this text – and all that it teaches – as much as any of the Gospel accounts of the Lord's empty tomb. It might be helpful to think of John 20:19–31 as the powerful outworking of Christ bursting the bounds of death and the grave. This is what it means, this is what has changed, this is how heaven and earth are better because Jesus rose again from the dead. That's what John 20 reveals to us.

What we celebrated last Sunday – Easter morning – really transformed heaven and earth. The new heavens and the new earth will be established in the authority and majesty of the risen Lord Jesus. As the first creation was established in Adam, so the new creation is established in the second Adam, Jesus. Nothing will ever be the same again because Jesus rose from the dead, never to taste death again. Today's text from John 20 begins to show us how things are different not only in the new creation but also in the old creation, in the here and now!

But things didn't begin with much promise. On that very first Easter evening, the disciples are locked up tight behind closed doors for fear of the Jews. You can't blame them. The Jewish leadership arrested Jesus in the night and had Him killed the next day. What would stop them from doing the same to them? And then there were all the rumors about Jesus being alive, risen from the dead. Several women claimed to have seen the risen Lord. Peter and John went to the tomb and found it empty. The grave clothes were neatly folded up next to where Jesus had been laid but they didn't see Jesus. Everything is bizarre and uncanny, to say the least.

All this had taken place over the previous 10–12 hours. The women went to the tomb at first light, now it's evening. Better lock the doors, just to be sure. Don't overlook John mentioning that the doors were locked (vs. 19). On one level it reveals the emotional,

mental, and spiritual state the disciples were in. But it also reveals something else, something that indicates how different things are now because Jesus rose from the dead.

Before the resurrection, Jesus never appeared or disappeared. He certainly performed miracles: healed the sick and diseased, walked on water, silenced storms, raised the dead, multiplied bread and fish, and so forth. As far as His body was concerned, He never did anything extraordinary. He slept, walked, ate, drank, etc. He humbled Himself and submitted to the normal, ordinary existence common to all humanity.

After the resurrection, that changes. Without doors being unlocked, Jesus suddenly stands in their midst and says, "Peace be with you." If you read all the post resurrection accounts in the gospels, you get the sense that Jesus is popping in and out quite regularly. Luke writes directly that Jesus vanished from the sight of the two Emmaus disciples once they recognized Him in the breaking of the bread (Lk 24:31).

The Lord Jesus Christ, true Son of God and glorified Son of Man, is no longer subject to the restrictions of ordinary human existence; locked doors can no longer restrict Him. To be sure, the Lord continues to eat and drink – those common human experiences. But He is no longer limited by them. As God and man, Jesus is present everywhere at all times and places. St. Paul is bold as to write that Jesus now fills all things, all heaven and earth (Eph 1:23; 4:9).

Time and space provide no boundaries or limitations for the Lord Jesus as both God and man. Please hear me well, as God and man, Jesus fills heaven and earth. That is why the Lord Jesus can be present here at Immanuel/St. John's according to both natures as well as being present in Vietnam or in each and every believing heart and mind in addition to filling all heaven and earth. John mentions that Jesus suddenly appears behind locked doors on the first Easter evening as well as a week later. He doesn't want us to miss the point! Things are very different now. Christ is risen!

And yet something else is different in heaven and earth because of Jesus' death and resurrection. John's gospel begins to explore this in vs. 21, "Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.'" The divine mission given by God the Father to His beloved Son continues after the resurrection ... in the Church! That is, God's mission continues in the here and now through people like you and me. A divine mission invested in human frailty. Now that's an interesting thought and a glorious privilege. The Lord Jesus entrusts us to continue His kingdom

work of love and reconciliation and restoration. In the truest sense of the word, you are all missionaries of the Lord Jesus Christ.

That mission is summarized in the word “Peace” spoken three times by Jesus; twice on Easter evening and once on the Sunday following Easter. One way to describe everything Jesus did and does is that He brings peace into the midst of a chaotic and disruptive world. That’s what sin and evil does to people’s hearts and lives, to communities and nations, to the entire world. Sin brings chaos and disorder. Consider what sin has done to you personally for a few moments. Has it not brought disorder to your heart, mind, emotions, and relationships of various kinds?

The Lord Jesus stepped into the midst of this world’s disordered chaos and brings peace. The Bible says Jesus is the Prince of Peace. As the Lord entered into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, the crowd shouted out these words, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” (Lk 19:38). The coming of the Lord Jesus to this earth to take up our flesh and blood, to live and die and rise again, brought peace to heaven and earth. Jesus is risen from the dead. Everything in heaven and earth has changed for the good.

The resurrected Jesus steps into the middle of the disciples’ disordered chaos, right into their fear and uncertainty. And He speaks peace, “peace be with you.” And when Jesus speaks, the thing spoken happens. Order is returned, harmony restored. “Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord” (vs. 20). Only after peace had been bestowed did gladness fill the disciples’ hearts and minds.

That mission of peace continues through us, the church, saints of God like you and me. We who have received the peace of the Lord also bestow His peace to others. And only the Church can give this peace. Not education, not government – democratic or otherwise, not empowered workers making better wages nor greater civil liberties. All of these are gifts of God but only the Church of Jesus Christ can bring peace. Only the Church can bring the peace of heaven to this broken, chaotic world.

After speaking peace to His disciples and commissioning them as missionaries of peace to the world (vs. 21), Jesus continues by saying, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld” (vs. 22–23). The means by which we conduct our mission of peace in behalf of the Lord Jesus is by forgiving sins. Maybe we should think of it like this...the goal of the Church’s mission is to bring the peace of heaven to earth. The means by

which we accomplish this goal is to forgive the sins of sinners. The apostle Paul makes that connection quite clear in Romans 5:1, “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” I can’t say this enough...heaven and earth are different now that Jesus is risen from the dead.

God the Father is at peace with us and we are at peace with God because the sins which separated us from God are now forgiven. Jesus died to pay for them. Jesus rose again to restore life and peace and harmony. The Church’s mission to bring heaven’s peace to the world can only be accomplished by going forth to forgive the sins of sinners.

John 20:21–23 is the classic text of Scripture that establishes the office of the Holy Ministry. If you ever wonder what it is your pastor should be doing, go straight to this passage of Scripture. Your pastor should be preaching and teaching and speaking and bestowing the forgiveness of sins in every situation of life. Matthew 16 and 18 describes it like this, “Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” What takes place here through Christ’s gospel mission of peace affects and changes heaven and vice versa. If I’m not doing that, then I’m being unfaithful to my call. If the Church and her members are not speaking words of forgiveness, then we are being unfaithful to our mission. But you are here. And the gospel is loved and proclaimed in this place. The mission of God is going forth in our midst! Thanks be to God!! May flourish and grow all the more vigorous.

Heaven and earth are better off now that Jesus is risen from the dead. That’s where we began today’s message. Dear saints, you are the Church. The risen Christ is in our midst. Through the office of the Holy Ministry, you have heard that you are forgiven and at peace with God. As such, you are missionaries in bringing peace and forgiveness to your world. Everything is different now that Jesus broke the slavish bonds of sin and death. Go forth into the world as His beloved people. God’s peace be with you always!!

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

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.