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

Second Sunday of Easter (Series A)

April 27, 2014

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.

Last week, we heard the very first Easter sermon. It was preached by an angel. Sitting on the stone in front of Jesus' empty tomb, the angel said to the two Marys "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said..." (Matt 28:5–6). The resurrected Jesus seconded that message with the exact same words, "Do not be afraid" (vs. 10), which He spoke to the Marys as they were running back to the Lord's disciples. Last week's Easter text had two primary messages: 1) Jesus is risen from the dead and 2) don't be afraid because Jesus is risen from the dead.

In many ways, today's service is Part II of last week's service. Except this week, the Easter proclamation is spoken in the positive, "Peace be with you." There are some differences, however, between today's service and last week's. For one, Jesus is the sole preacher in this week's gospel, no angels are present. For another, it's Easter evening rather than Easter morning at least in vs. 19–25, the focus of today's message. You see, we need at least two Sundays every year in order to celebrate fully the importance and glory of Easter!! Not to mention that we dedicate 7 weeks to the Easter season. Lent and Holy Week get 6 weeks.

The resurrection always gets priority. For if Christ is not risen then, according to the apostle Paul in I Corinthians 15, our faith is in vain. If Christ is not risen then we are still in our sins and every Christian dies in a false hope. But Christ is risen from the dead and lives and reigns to all eternity! Our peace in this life and for the life to come is established in the triumph of Christ's resurrection. That's the take home message for today, Part II of our Easter celebration.

The setting for today's gospel reading is the waning hours of that first Easter Sunday. Rumors have been circulating that Jesus has been raised from the dead. Peter and John have been to the empty tomb. Even some of the women who had followed Jesus

during His earthly ministry were claiming to have seen angels and even the resurrected Lord. The 10 disciples of our Lord are locked behind closed doors as well as imprisoned in fear, shame, and guilt. (I need to point out that Thomas wasn't there. He shows up a week later as described in vs. 24^{ff}. Sadly, we won't get to those verses today.) These were the same men who had told Jesus that they would never abandon Him, that they would die rather than deny the Lord. When the soldiers came to arrest Jesus, they tucked tail and ran for cover.

And they're still hiding in fear. No words of peace have broken their fear not even the women's report that they had seen angels and the resurrected Lord. In all likelihood, such reports only heightened their fear. The authorities will be listening and watching, just waiting to snatch Jesus' disciples. And who knows, they may suffer the same fate! And what of their families? Would the authorities go after them? And what of the past 3 years? The apostles had abandoned jobs and livelihoods to follow Jesus. How will they survive now if the authorities don't get them? Fear, fear, fear on every hand. Lock the doors. Make them fast and secure. Fear.

And suddenly, without warning or notice, the Lord Jesus appears in their midst. He proclaims, "Peace be with you" (vs. 19). And then our Lord shows them His hands and His side (vs. 20) in order to remove any doubts. This *is* the crucified Jesus, risen from the dead. Sin, death, the grave, and fear, yes fear, are conquered. Jesus is alive. Peace is given.

Only a crucified and resurrected Jesus can give peace that overcomes guilt and shame and failure and fear. His benediction, "Peace be with you" is blood-bought. We know that His peace is invincible because Jesus endured God the Father's wrath poured out against humanity's sin; the peace of Jesus remains steadfast for He descended into hell in order to proclaim His victory over the powers of Satan and the grave during His 3 days in the tomb; our Lord's peace carries divine power for He broke the woeful grasp of Death itself during the early hours of that first Easter Sunday. "Peace be with you" is a powerful gospel promise and pledge of divine action and love. Look at the crucifixion marks in His hands and side. In them find your hope and your peace!

You might be tempted to think, "That was well and good for them, those 10 disciples. But what of us who live 2,000 years later? We can't see the crucifixion marks in the resurrected Jesus." Well, I'm glad you asked.

In vs. 21, Jesus again speaks the same benediction, “Peace be with you.” The Lord continues, “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” The Lord commissions His Church to continue His mission and ministry. That is, they too will proclaim the peace of Christ that surpasses all human understanding. Jesus will continue to give peace to all people through His redeemed Church. When we proclaim the Lord’s gospel, we do so under the authority of Jesus and His Father. What of the Holy Spirit? Glad you asked.

Vs. 22, “And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’” The preaching of Jesus is Holy Spirit inspired and invested with the authority of God the Father and God the Son. So the peace proclaimed here each and every Sunday is none other than a Trinitarian message of Easter triumph and joy. The Father sent the Son to die and rise again so that through the on-going presence of the Holy Spirit the world may know God’s peace and love. No other institution or organization has this kind of power and promise. These gifts belong only to the Church and are to be shared with all nations and cultures of our world.

Invested with the authority of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and having been filled with the Holy Spirit, the Church receives yet another gift: the office of the Holy Ministry whereby the peace of Jesus is given to the world. Verse 23 describes the creation of the Church’s ministry, “If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld.” Christ’s peace is given to all people by means of the Lord’s forgiveness distributed through preaching and holy sacraments.

Pastors are ordained by the Lord through His beloved Church to proclaim justification, that is, sinners are forgiven freely forever because of Jesus. And through justification, sinners have peace with God. So concludes the apostle Paul in Romans 5:1, “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” The office of the Holy Ministry is ordained by Christ for the sole purpose of forgiving repentant sinners and withholding forgiveness from the unrepentant as long as they do not repent. As a pastor, I work in the realm of justifying sinners and thereby share the peace of Christ. That’s my job in a nutshell.

As a Church, we bring the peace of Christ to a fear-filled world by proclaiming the forgiveness of sins He won by dying and rising again. That’s our divine commission. Give the peace of Christ to anyone and everyone as freely and as widely as possible.

As you good folks know, I do my best to avoid any kind of manipulative, guilt-laden tactics. I refuse to use fear and shame as tools for encouraging evangelism or enhancing weekly offerings. The reason I do my best to avoid those kinds of methods is found here in John 20. All of us have received freely and powerfully the gift of Christ's peace through the forgiveness of sins He obtained for us. God the Father did not guilt or shame or manipulate His Son into accomplishing the divine mission of saving the world. Jesus embraced the Father's will joyfully and courageously.

Did not Jesus say, "As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you"? We are to follow the Lord Jesus in all things. He did not use guilt and shame and manipulation to accomplish His Father's will. Nor are we. Nor am I.

Dear saints, I encourage you to grow in your love and desire to hear those beautiful words, "Your sins are forgiven." Long for them. Seek them out weekly in Church, daily in Bible study and prayer. And I encourage you to share the peace of Christ with everyone you know. Bring them to Church so that they can receive Christ's peace through His ordained ministry. For the Church is the only place they will hear it.

Share the peace and forgiveness with people daily. Start at home with your family. The home is the incubator and sanctuary for all true piety and godliness. Then move out to friends and neighbors and acquaintances. Divine peace comes through those simple but powerful words, "Your sins are forgiven because of Jesus." This is who we are and what we do. Evangelism, offerings, growing in the knowledge of Jesus, growth in spiritual gifts, all of God's divine blessings flow from Christ's love and forgiveness. Those things flourish when there is peace, not guilt or shame or fear.

We gather here on this Second Sunday of Easter to receive the peace promised by the resurrected Jesus. His peace comes through forgiveness preached and distributed in the holy Sacrament by our Lord's ordained ministry. Your sins are forgiven. You need not hide behind doors of fear any longer. Live in the peace of Christ, now and into the ages of ages, world without end.

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.