

JESUS IN THE MIDST OF HIS DISCIPLES TODAY

Christ is Risen!

Hear again the Word of God for this second Sunday in the season of the Resurrection of our Lord:

Becoming then evening of that day, the first of the week, and the doors having been locked shut where the disciples were on account of the fear of the Jews, Jesus came, and stood in the midst (of them), and says, "Peace to all of you."¹

And after eight days, again His disciples were inside, and Thomas (was) with them. Comes Jesus, the doors having been locked shut, and He stood in the midst (of them) and said "Peace to all of you!"²

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

A divine mystery that is a regularly revealed among us is this: in each Lord's Service, Jesus comes into the midst of His people. The Word of God repeatedly reinforces that Truth. The most recent time that happened here before today was in Jesus' resurrection Services here this past Wednesday. Then, those of our fellowship whom God had called into His morning and evening services heard that God, in Christ, continues to go ahead of His people to give them His gifts. It was repeatedly proclaimed that He does so in order to serve them. Jesus meets His people's true needs without any work or merit on their part.

As a matter of fact, today's Gospel reading twice reinforces those divine realities. Jesus went ahead of His followers from death into life. He then appeared among them in their time of need. The eyewitness record of Jesus' first day and eighth day resurrection appearances declare that He showed up in the midst of those who did not even believe the confusing messages of angels: "He has been raised. He does not remain here."³ As many of us heard last week, that proclamation means that, "Jesus is not confined to one place in His bodily resurrection from the grave. " He is free to go ahead of His followers, which He continues to do, to serve them.

Chief in His service is the gift which He pronounced in greeting to the Ten, and

¹ John 20:19.

² John 20:26.

³ Mark 16:6.

then, a week later, to the Eleven: “Peace to all of you.” Jesus appeared in their midst in the room where His disciples had gathered on the days we call Resurrection Sunday and Easter II. Those Sundays became connected to Christ in time, and forever. That is a truth we are gathered to celebrate in the Church each year.

Today’s Gospel reading makes it clear that those men certainly did nothing to bring Jesus to themselves. Why, they had gathered behind locked doors, on account of fear – not of God, but of men! Nothing in the textual records indicates that those fearing men were offering any of the priestly sacrifices of either God’s Old Covenant or His New Covenant priesthood. No animals were being slaughtered, wine poured out or grain waved. No responses of prayer, praise or thanksgiving were being offered on those two Sundays among the trembling followers of Jesus.

Consider those disciples lack of reception of God’s gifts on those two Sundays in light of that which this congregation was found doing on the Sunday after the Ascension, AD 2010. Five years ago on Easter VII, in this building attacked by fire from the hands of a man who hated the image of the cross, God gathered His people. Those who were here, a fewer number than God regularly gathers here now, were experiencing many emotions, among them: disbelief, shock, anger and sadness. Then, it was proclaimed:

“One cannot kill the Church of Jesus Christ by burning her buildings – for they will not last through the fires of the Last Day. One cannot kill Christ’s Church by killing her members, for they live forever in Him. But, history has shown, repeatedly, that when the confessing Church is persecuted, she rises stronger and with more living souls in her, than when she is left alone!”⁴

The wounded congregation could have followed the instincts of some – and locked the doors. They might have heeded the voices that over the years have spoken against remaining on their property, in *this* neighborhood. They could have returned to the desire to relocate to a “better location” which was a spirit which lay behind this congregation’s concerted long-range planning effort in the late 1990s.

But, God allowed us to recognize that God in Christ had called us into one people,

⁴ Morehouse, Michael A. ONE CANNOT KILL THE CHURCH OF CHRIST, Resurrection VII sermon, Catalina Lutheran Church: Tucson, 2010, p. 2.

in one place, that He might give us His gifts on this high place. So, rather than locking the doors in fear, we opened them, and news reporters came, along with members of sister congregations. We responded to God's gifts in the midst of restoration with our sacrifices of prayer, praise and thanksgiving. We were reminded that Jesus is in the midst of His disciples wherever His Word and Sacraments are rightly found, even in torched buildings.

God raised His congregation from the ashes. He has continued to multiply His gifts among us. Just look around you at those whom God added to the number from that historically low year in our history. Consider how He has given each of you to one another. He has done so that He might continue to build you into One Body, under One Head, Jesus the Christ, with His gifts.

You are free to hear each other later today as members of Christ's Body. Declare to one another that which God has done to bring you here. Share your dreams and hopes for God's work in this place, as they remain founded upon God's Word. Tell your brothers and sisters in Christ of that which you believe He will do among us, in our community, in the Church at large in this nation and around the world.

Through good times and bad, in seasons of pressure and seasons of relief, God has kept the doors of this congregation open. God has been doing that among us through His Word. He recovers the lost, through His Word working among us. He corrects the erring, by means of His Word. He binds up the brokenhearted, with His gifts delivered in His Word. Hear again the Word of God which has led us to those conclusions:

Then Jesus said them again, "Peace to all of you. Just as He sent Me, the Father, also I continue to send all of you."

Then, saying this, He breathed upon them, and He says to them, "All of you receive (the) Holy Spirit, whatsoever sins you all might have forgiven, they have been forgiven them; whatsoever all of you might continue to retain, they have been retained." ⁵

Eternal and earthly realities revealed from the Word of God come from hearing,

⁵ John 20:2-221.

and believing the connections Jesus makes in those sentences. He, God raised from the dead, proclaims God's peace. He declares His will to send His called men according to the Father's will. He gives them the Holy Spirit – Who, by His Word is connected to the Son and the Father in this text. With that Spirit, Jesus gives the Office of the Keys to those men whom He is sending in the peace of the Lord.

Jesus, through His gift of Peace, through His sending according to the Father's will, through His giving the Holy Spirit to those men whom He has called into the Father's work, through God's action in the Office of the Keys, has been giving His gifts here since February 6, 1983. One year from the date of the first Service of the Word of the mission that became this congregation, God sent to this assembly the first man who followed in the footsteps of the Eleven who had assembled behind locked doors.

From that time, God has placed men in this assembly to declare His peace to repentant sinners through the Office of the Keys. At times, due to the human frailty of the men who exercised the Office of the Keys, and/or in the people who were to receive those gifts, God removed His called men. At other times, due to God's need for His called men elsewhere, He called them to serve His gifts to other people whom He had assembled. Yet, even in the periods in the increasing length of God's history of Jesus's Presence in this congregation, God still brought in men to follow in the apostle's footsteps. He did so that His gifts might continue to be given to repentant, forgiven sinners.

In addition, God has granted His peace here for about a third of the congregation's life through more than one man at a time exercising God's Office of the Keys. Soon, if it is according to His will, He will do so again. If the tradition of Jesus continues to be followed here, our fifth called pastor, should he receive and accept the Divine Call we have issued, our new pastor will soon be the first man to be ordained in the face of this congregation. (All others to whom God has given the Divine Call to serve here were ordained into the Office elsewhere). Jesus will declare His peace upon him; send him to us; breathe the Holy Spirit into him; and place in his loving hands the Office of the Keys.

Then, these words which many of you have learned to confess from the *Small Catechism* will be yours to apply to the new pastor's work among us:

I believe that when the called ministers of Christ deal with us by His divine command, in particular when they exclude openly unrepentant sinners from the Christian congregation and absolve those who repent of their sins and want to do better, this is just as valid and certain, even in heaven, as if Christ our dear Lord dealt with us Himself. ((1986), 2005, p. 29)

Our resurrected Lord Jesus' gift of peace, proclaimed in the forgiveness of sins to repentant sinners will continue among us. In receiving this gift, we recall anew that Jesus is in the midst of His disciples today. In Holy Absolution, Jesus speaks through the mouth of His called men and declares that we have true and everlasting peace with God.

That peace with God was purchased with Jesus' holy innocent blood. That peace Jesus died to bring. That peace is a gift that even those who have fallen from the Faith may receive. Our text for the day makes that clear in recording the instances of the fearing Ten, and the one who is known as "Doubting Thomas."

Yet, it seems though that he truly did not doubt any more than the other ten. Thomas was simply absent during Jesus' first locked room appearance. None of the others had believed the women's report. All of them needed personal proof.

By the eighth day of Jesus' resurrection from the dead, all the Eleven had that proof. Thomas' conversion, though with more personal dialogue, was the same as the others. He saw the resurrected Jesus. He heard the resurrected Jesus. He believed the resurrected Jesus. There is no indication in any of the parallel Gospel texts that Thomas even touched the wounds of the risen Christ. When Jesus challenged Thomas to touch Him, He says to Thomas, *you must not continue to know unbelief, but belief.*⁶ To which,

*Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and My God!"
Jesus says to him, "Because you saw me yourself, you believed? Blessed (are)
the ones not beholding and believing!"⁷*

⁶ John 20:27b.

⁷ John 20:28-29.

Thomas believed Jesus at His Word. After all, he had just received Jesus' peace. Thomas "owned," as we would say, the Good News that he, with the others, had been declared right with God.

Thomas then, in the spiritual sight which comes with the Faith, no longer had any need to touch Lord's wounds in order to verify His Real Presence. As God has moved all believers since to confess, Thomas declared of Jesus, *My Lord and My God!* He truly "saw," with eyes of the Faith Who Jesus is – the God Who has died to bring forgiveness, and has been raised from the dead to declare right with the Father those who believe. (Here is a text which agrees with St. Paul's confession of Jesus, *Who was delivered up for our offenses, and was raised for our justification.* (Rom. 4:25NKJV))⁸

Just so, are you free with Thomas, to declare of Jesus, *My Lord and My God*, because you believe that which has been written by the Apostles and Evangelists. You have repeatedly received God's peace. In, that peace, through *continually believing, life all of you might continue to have in His Name.*⁹ Therefore, we who have God's peace confess the presence of Christ in the midst of His disciples continue to declare:

Christ is risen!

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Resurrection II (LSB One-year series)

Psalm 33; Ezekiel 37:1-14; I John 5:4-10; John 20:19-31

April 12, 2015

Pastor Michael A. Morehouse

Soli Deo Gloria

4:25NKJV))

⁸ (Here is a text which agrees with St. Paul's confession of Jesus, *Who was delivered up for our offenses, and was raised for our justification.* (Rom.

⁹ *John 20:31b.*