

Quasimodo Geniti
10 & 11 April, Anno Domini 2021
St. John 20:19-31
Pastor Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father and of the +Son and of the Holy Spirit.

There were a lot of things that Jesus could have said to the disciples that Easter evening. “Cowards.” “Worthless friends.” “Unbelievers.” “Liars.” These same disciples who had argued numerous times about who among them was the greatest, had tucked tail and run like cowards when their Lord was betrayed and arrested. Peter, who had sworn up one side and down the other that He would never leave Jesus' side, three times denied even knowing who Jesus was. No one stood up for Jesus. No one came forward on His behalf to defend Him or speak well of Him. And there they were, huddled in the same room where Jesus had first fed them with His own Body and Blood, cowering for fear of the Jews, thinking again only of themselves and how to save their own skin, even AFTER hearing from the women that Jesus was alive and seeing the empty tomb for themselves.

And in the midst of all that - right smack dab in the middle of their terror and their doubt, through a bolted and locked door - Jesus came and stood. He barged right in, not waiting for an invitation or for the disciples to muster up the courage to go looking for Him in Galilee. He knew they were filled with fear and confusion and doubt. So He sought them out even when He had every right and reason to abandon them as they had abandoned Him. He would have been justified to leave them trembling and panicking in that room, forever afraid of men and terrified of their own guilt. That's probably what we would have done. We would have written off such so-called friends. We would be happy to see them get what they deserve. We are vindictive by nature and love to see people get what they deserve. We rejoice when the other person speeding gets pulled over. We take joy in seeing celebrities and politicians get carted off to prison.

And that is why, in that moment when Jesus appeared, the fear of the Jews was gone and a much deeper fear settled into the hearts of the disciples. There stood their Lord. What would He do or say to them after all that they had done in the last few days? The twelve knew full-well that they deserved Jesus' wrath and judgment. They expected that Jesus would punish them, hold their weakness

and cowardice against them, and berate them for their unbelief. For that brief second before Jesus spoke, the disciples believed that they were dead, that Jesus was about to destroy them. Their hearts and heads were racing, probably trying to come up with excuses or plea-deals to temper Jesus' anger, knowing that there wasn't anything that they could say or do to defend themselves. They were guilty. Suddenly the wrath of Jews didn't seem so bad.

But before the disciples could say anything, Jesus spoke. He didn't want or need them to speak. They needed Him to speak. They needed the words that only Jesus can speak. This is how conversion works. God speaks and man listens. The risen Christ meets us in the dark sealed tombs of our fear and calls forth dead Lazarus. Jesus didn't chastise the disciples. He didn't gloat. He came to give them what they needed but couldn't have imagined - peace. He came to forgive them. He came to restore them and give them hope. He came to raise them from their own death. With those three simple words Jesus pulled His followers out of their own tombs of despair and hopelessness, out of the very depths of hell itself into which they had been flung by the Law's strict judgment. How absolutely glorious that Jesus' first words to His apostles were "Peace to you." The disciples weren't in need of miracles. They didn't need motivational speeches to get them going. They needed that simple word. They needed to hear Jesus preach, to tell them that He wouldn't hold their abject and inexcusable failure against them. That was the only thing that could help them - the promise of forgiveness and restoration. And that is exactly what Jesus had come to give them - life where there should have only been death, forgiveness where there should have been judgment.

How often do we find ourselves like the disciples, huddled in fear because the world threatens to overthrow us? How often do we hide in silence rather than stand and make the good confession? How often do we let men keep us from Christ? How often do we obsess about what others think of us but hardly give a second thought to what God sees when He looks into our hearts and minds? How often have we cowered in fear, trying to hide because of our sin, hoping that no one, especially God, will find us, because we know what we deserve, what should happen to us. Our souls feel trapped - afraid of man and afraid of God with no where to turn.

There are certainly a lot of things that Jesus could say to us, today. He could justifiably list out for us all the evil that we have done and the good we have

failed to do and we would have nowhere to hide. He could tell us all the evil things we have thought about our neighbor. He could play back for us the times that we have silently allowed others to spew out false things about God, His Word, His Church and at times, even participated. And for those and all the other evils that we have done, Jesus would have every right to say "I never knew you." And we would deserve it.

"Peace to you." That is, in fact, what Jesus says. To you who fear your sin, who have felt the terror of hell on account of your rebellion, who have experienced the hammer of the Divine Law upon your conscience - peace to you. To you whose soul is crushed by the weight of your guilt, peace to you. To you whose bodies are filled with disease and weakness and pain, peace to you. To you who mourn, whose families have abandoned you, whose days seem to only be filled with difficulty and failure, peace to you. To you who are afraid of the darkness that is sweeping over the world and the hatred of God's Word that is rising to a fevered pitch - peace to you. Jesus has died and now He lives! Jesus' death is your death. You have died with Him in the waters of Holy Baptism. You have already died the death to sin that you fear. There is no longer judgment. Only peace. In Christ God loves you, He is pleased with you, He will bless you and sustain you no matter how dark your days or how deep your sin. You are forgiven. You have been raised with Him to newness of life. You are restored. You have overcome the world with all of its hatred, all of its temptation, all of its persecution. Jesus, who has overcome sin, death, the devil, the sinful world, and your sinful flesh stands in your midst and gives that victory to you who receive His promise in faith.

Peace to you. It is a simple word. But if our hearts could grasp the full weight of that glorious sermon, we would be forever free of doubt, fear, and worry. And one day we will know that peace in all of its fullness. One day there will be no more cancer, no more lust, no more anger, no more depression or anxiety, no more jealousy, no more chemical or hormonal imbalances or dependencies, no more defiant children, no more mounting debts, no more tyrannical governments. One day there will be ONLY Jesus standing in our midst. One day there will be ONLY peace.

And until that day, Jesus comes and stands in your midst to give you that peace. Not in the rivers or the woods. Not in your living room or bedroom. Not in the dark recesses of your heart, but here in His holy house where He stands in

Word, in Office, in the font, in the host and in the cup. The same Jesus who stood in the midst of the twelve, sent those witnesses to do the same thing, to stand in your midst and proclaim "Peace to you", to hold up right in front of your eyes the very Body and Blood of Jesus crucified and risen so that the peace of the Lord might be with you always, to shine like a bright light in the midst of your darkness of guilt and despair. This word of peace is what your wearied and frightened souls long for. This word of peace is the pure spiritual milk that nourishes and strengthens you, gives you new hope and fresh strength for the journey ahead. It is simple but it is everything you need. And Jesus is here among you again this day to give you the peace that passes all human understanding.

Peace to you.

In the Name of +Jesus.