

Quasimodo Geniti with the Rite of Confirmation for Jack Cronister and Cora Pearson

St. John 20:19-31

12 April, Anno Domini 2026

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

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

People of the resurrection,

In the First Commandment we are forbidden from having any other gods and as Dr. Luther explains that in the Small Catechism, that means that we are to fear, love, and trust in the true and only God above all things. So why are we so often holed up behind locked doors afraid of the world, afraid of the opinions of our neighbors, afraid of death? Why do we indulge our sinful flesh afraid that we are going to miss out on something good? Why in both our thoughts and our deeds do we live as though Jesus is still in the tomb?

There was truly no reason for the disciples to be filled with fear. Their fear betrayed their doubts. After Good Friday, they suddenly weren't sure that Jesus was who He said He was or that He would do what He said He was going to do. They didn't know what to think about Jesus saying that He would rise again and that He would go before them to Galilee. Their doubts were weighing heavily on their hearts, making it difficult to simply listen to Jesus and believe Him. But I think it is fair to say that they believed. After all, they did gather together in the upper room. They didn't know exactly what to expect but they knew they should gather and pray and talk.

What drove their doubt was the possibility that death was the truth, that death had swallowed God, that the Jews had overcome Jesus and would do the same to them, that they would suffer terrible humiliation at the hands of the Jews because they had put their trust in this Jesus. But, again, this was the third day and Jesus did say something about rising on the third day. Now, where they should have been was Galilee because that is where Jesus said He would go. Their fear kept them in Jerusalem but their instinct to gather was the right one.

It should be ours as well. Our instinct and desire should always be to gather as the

body of Christ where Christ is. Our instinct should be to pray together, sing together, eat together, hear together, learn together, rejoice together, suffer together both in our homes and in our congregation. Our doubts and afflictions should lead us to church not away from it because they should lead us to Christ, not away from Him.

That was the mistake that Thomas made. Thomas, who had once rallied the disciples to go with Jesus so that they could die with Him, had allowed his fear to isolate him. He wasn't with his brothers. He put himself in a very dangerous position. He had given up hope. He had apostasized. Even when the other apostles went and told him that they had seen Jesus, it wasn't enough. He didn't believe their testimony. He had to see for himself. He had to touch the wounds.

Thanks be to God for His great mercy and patience with the weakness and foolishness of us poor sinners. Thomas was not immediately struck down for his blasphemy and impiety. God bore with him. God sent the other apostles to Thomas to urge him to join them again the next week in the upper room as they prayed and studied the Scriptures. And, just as He had promised, there, where more than two or three were gathered together in His Name, Jesus came and stood in their midst bestowing upon them the true peace which passes all human understanding, the peace of forgiveness won, the peace of Satan's crushed head, the peace of His crucified body standing there very much alive. He is doing the very same thing for us, for you, here today.

Our Lord bore patiently with Thomas' doubt but He didn't let him remain in it. He called Thomas back through His brother apostles. And though our Lord did appear to Thomas and invited him to put his hands in the nail prints and the spear wound, He also chastised Thomas for not believing the testimony of his brothers and, therefore, for not being gathered with the Church on Easter evening. If we believe the apostolic and prophetic testimony, then we will be found gathered with the rest of the body of Christ to receive the peace of His pierced hands and feet, which is administer into both our ears and our mouths.

This day we have the great joy of receiving into communicant fellowship Jack and Cora, two more who by God's grace have heard the apostolic testimony and been drawn to the upper room so that with all the people of God they might receive the true Body and Blood of Christ for the forgiveness of their sins and be filled with the peace that passes all human understanding. This is indeed a day of great rejoicing for Jack and Cora, for our congregation, and for the Holy Christian Church! The faith that was born through the water and the Word has been watered and

nourished and will now feast on the fruits of Jesus' death and resurrection.

It is a truly profound and wonderful thing when the Holy Spirit works faith in a person. The preaching breath of Almighty God blows into the unbeliever's ear and brings life in the midst of death. The Holy Spirit reveals to the sinner the condemnation under which they stand, bringing that person to contrition and repentance and then holds Jesus Christ and Him crucified before the penitent's eyes so that faith might grasp on to His sacrifice. The Spirit with and through the Blood and water that poured from Jesus' pierced side testifies that all who believe in the Son of God have been cleansed of the guilt of their sins and overcome the world, having been called out of the multitude of unbelievers. Bones that were once dry and brittle have been refreshed with the living waters of Holy Baptism and a new man has been brought forth born not of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man but of God's will. And, as Scripture makes clear, those who have been called by the Gospel are called into and made members of the body of Christ, the Holy Christian Church. We are not left to wander through this valley of the shadow of death alone. How ugly and cruel, how loveless and joyless that would be! "He places the solitary in a home" writes the psalmist. We are surrounded by our brothers and sisters in the faith that they might support and encourage us and we them. We don't gather here because we are checking off a duty box for God. We gather because it is our home, our Father's house where He feeds us and gives us life and where we can be with our beloved brothers and sisters to support and encourage one another in the truth.

The disciples, though filled with doubts, still gathered in the upper room. That is what faith does. It gathers with the rest of the faithful. To despise the gathering by not gathering is to confess division from those who gather. It is to say "I don't have anything in common with you. I don't care about you, I need nothing from you, and you will receive nothing from me." That is sad and painful to the body. It hurts the body when members withhold themselves, when members are at war and divided from one another, when parts of the body are missing. It's why the apostles ran out and pressed on Thomas to return with them, to join the fellowship of faith. Not only did it hurt and sadden the body that Thomas wasn't there, Thomas was cutting himself off from salvation because he was separating himself from the faith. This is why if any of us ever notice a brother or sister in Christ hasn't gathered with us, even for just a week, we all have a duty of love to reach out and check on them. Maybe they are sick and need help. Maybe they are traveling and need our prayers. Maybe their faith is under attack and they need encouragement and counsel. We won't know or be able to help if we don't ask.

Indeed, what is the final hope of our faith? That all of God's people will finally and forever be gathered into one in the eternal presence of Jesus and that gathering will never be broken up. "There will be one flock, one shepherd." (John 10:16) Why then would the flock not gather around the shepherd here on earth as it is surrounded by wolves, threatened and afflicted and plagued by weakness and temptation? That is why Jack and Cora were so thrilled to finally reach this day - so that they could fully participate in the life of the body of Christ and join us in feasting on the true food of His Flesh and the the true drink of His Blood for the strengthening of their faith and their bond of love to Christ's people.

Beloved children, do not be afraid. You have been gathered into the flock of the Good Shepherd who stands in your midst proclaiming to you through His undershepherds the peace of His cross. Your fears are all unfounded because Christ is risen. Death and hell lie vanquished under His feet. Your sin is atoned for and cannot condemn you. The world is overcome and the devil has been crushed. You have been joined to the victorious Christ and been given a share in His victory. And you have been gathered into the mystical body of Christ, His holy Christian family with whom you partake of all the riches and blessings of His kingdom.

Peace be with you.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all human understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord.