

Peace to You

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER [b]

April 6, 2018

John 20:19-31

¹⁹ **On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."** ²⁰ **When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.** ²¹ **Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."** ²² **And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."** ²⁴ Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe." ²⁶ Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." ²⁸ Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." ³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

IN THE NAME OF JESUS.

Jesus enters a room ... and what? It's almost like one of those old jokes that start it with "a doctor and a lawyer walk into a bar and ..." And then we expect the punchline.

Jesus enters a room, and we expect ...what?

Before we get to what we should expect from Jesus when he enters, John gives us a look at the other people in the room. John 20:19:

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews.

Do we need to know anything more about that room than that? It's a room of disciples bound together in fear. The Apostles had seen their Lord crucified three days prior, they had seen the false charges spoken by the teachers of the Law, and how those accusations of Law led to death, and they knew that the teachers of the Law were still on the loose.

(The phrase "The Jews" here does not mean the Jewish people—Jesus himself is Jewish—but it refers to the party of those putting people under the Law.)

So they gathered in fear. That's the thing binding them together in that room—it's a fellowship of fear. Fear of the teachers of the Law, fear of the Law's accusation, fear of death.

If they had no fear, they would not have been huddled in that room.

That's the room Jesus enters. Now what should we expect from Jesus?

When Jesus enters a room, it is toward one purpose. And that purpose is given in the first word out of our Lord's mouth: "Peace."

The Apostles are gathered for fear. Fear is brought by the Law. For the Law always accuses, and by the accusation of the Law the conscience is not at peace, so that when two or three people gather themselves together, and they have no relief from the accusation of the Law, they will be gathered in fear, whether they know it or not.

Even when God's Law is taught wrongly, as it was by the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law, even when God's Law is misapplied and used to gain power, it is still God's Law, and it still does its accusation, and consciences are not at peace.

The Apostles are gathered in fear. That's the room Jesus enters. He repeats the word "peace" a second time, and he brings fear's opposite.

²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." ²² And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the

Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”

[John 20:22]

Peace is the sinner released from fear; it is the conscience cleansed of guilt. *Peace to you* is this gift of a cleansed and freed conscience being brought right to the sinner by the Word of Jesus.

And that Word which cleanses and frees the conscience, which rescues from fear, is the Word of Gospel, the Word of sins-forgiven, and that's the Word he sends the Apostles out with, so they can enter rooms filled with fear, and cleanse consciences.

That's why Jesus enters a room. To cleanse the conscience, to rescue from fear, to speak *Peace*.

He enters our rooms. Maybe not always literal rooms that we're locked in, but places where we are found in our fear.

A person lays in a hospital room, perhaps, not knowing what tomorrow brings, and by his Word, Jesus enters that room: *Peace to you*.

Another goes to bed, rolling around in his mind the wrong that was done to him by another. In this contemplation he keeps remembering the sin, even contemplating retribution, and this is nothing other than a contemplation of Law's accusations. And Jesus enters: *Peace to you*.

Some people gather in conversation, perhaps speaking ill of another, perhaps even slandering and holding onto sins, and Jesus enters that conversation of fear to say, *Peace to you*.

He enters our rooms, our lives, and it is always for the purpose of speaking peace to consciences filled with fear and retribution.

He enters by his Word. His Word he spoke to his Apostles, his Word, then, which he had written down in Scripture so it could be brought down to us and our families, his Word which is much more than just facts and data and information, but is his voice to us.

In that Word brought to us in Holy Scripture, the Word by which he instituted his gift of Holy Baptism and of Holy Communion and of Holy Absolution, the Word which he has preached in his church, wherever he is gathering people together to his Name to cleanse consciences—in that Word he is coming to us and we encounter our Lord.

The words of Holy Scripture are Jesus coming to us in our lives.

We impoverish ourselves when we treat Holy Scripture as chiefly a book of facts and information. It does have facts and information. Facts such as the Israelites being delivered from slavery in Egypt, or King David sitting on the throne in Jerusalem, or Jesus being born at the time of Herod, of him being crucified under Pontius Pilate—it does have facts and information. But if that's what we are learning the Scriptures for, we are impoverished.

For these are the Words revealing our Savior; they are the Words to which the Holy Spirit has bound himself and by which he is bringing to us our Lord Jesus; they are the words by which Jesus enters into our rooms, into our lives, and we encounter him, and he impacts us with the Gospel; they are the Words by which he comes to us in all that he is to forgive our sins, to cleanse our consciences, and bring us out of fear.

So Jesus enters and says to his Apostles,

“Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.”²² And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”

This is the gift of the Word of Absolution. It is the cleansing of the conscience. Where sins are forgiven, the accusation of the Law is broken, and the conscience is freed.

What sins are not forgiven but withheld? Jesus took all sins upon himself, when he had John the Baptist

baptize him into unity with the sinners. He took all sins to the cross, and crucified them in his own body. He died for *all* sins, for every sinner, none left out.

There is no sin, there is no guilt in our consciences, there is no shame covering us, from which Jesus has not cleansed us with his own blood and spoken us forgiven of in his word of Absolution.

Then what sins are withheld from forgiveness?

Only those sins we insist on dealing with ourselves. Only those sins we think to justify ourselves of. Only those sins from which we would free ourselves by our own improvement of our lives and our own keeping of the Law. The only sins withheld from forgiveness are those we withhold from him who forgives all sins. That is, only those sins for which we refuse his gift of repentance and forgiveness.

But he forgives all sins, none left out. No sinner left out. For he withheld no sin from his death on the cross.

This is his gift of Confession and Absolution, his voice of Gospel. This is him, Jesus, entering our rooms, our lives, by his Word, finding us in our fear, and cleansing our consciences, saying to us, *Peace to you*.

1 John 1:9:

When we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ When we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

IN THE NAME OF JESUS.