

John 20:19-31
Easter 2; April 3 & 4, 2016

Do you ever doubt something? Did you lock your car when you parked it this morning/evening? How about your home – did you lock your doors this morning, last night? How safe do you feel about your job? Are you afraid that you may get weaker as you grow older? Are you afraid that you may not have saved enough for your retirement?

Do you ever doubt God and what his plan is for your life? That is a harder question, isn't it? We would probably all like to say that we never doubt God, but you and I both know that isn't always true. There are real fears that rise up in the lives of real people. More often than we care to admit, we respond like Thomas in our text: **"Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."** We have real fears in our lives.

The disciples were experiencing real fear behind those locked doors. They are all huddled together like scared little children. They have heard the reports from the women who claimed to have seen Jesus. Peter and John have seen the empty tomb. Why didn't they get it? Everything was happening exactly how Jesus said it was going to be. There were no surprises.

Why don't we get it sometime? We know the words found in the Bible. We know them well. Yet, we still doubt don't we? I do. Why did you come to church today? You came to listen and participate in worship. Right? There really is nothing new that hasn't happened in church before. Think of how many times you have confessed your sins. We need to confess OUR sins. We need to hear that they ARE forgiven in Christ. Yet, you could also recite the words of Absolution that one of the pastors says. We sing three or four hymns. Some we like more than others. I'm pretty sure that many of you have heard the words of this text before. In a few minutes, I will place an offering into the offering plates as they are passed around. We receive the Lord's body and blood in the Lord's Supper; The same body and blood that Jesus poured out for us on Good Friday. We leave hearing God's blessing once again. Why do we come to church? We need to hear those words again and again. We come to have doubts removed.

We are broken, scared and frightened sinners who need to hear the words of Jesus in our text. **"Peace be with you."** **"Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."** Jesus would have completely justified in saying to them: *Why don't you guys get this? I've told you this many times. Why are you being a bunch of....?* Instead he looks at them and has compassion. The first word he says to them is **"Peace."**

This peace is more than a temporary ceasefire. This **peace** means that we live in a state of peace. The Christian faith is more than just a series of do's and don'ts in our lives. It isn't something that we *"do on a Sunday morning."* At the center of the Gospel is a God who loves you. He loves you so much that now the empty tomb changes everything. Jesus standing there with his disciples changes everything. He says: **"But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."** He wanted his disciples to know that no matter what life may throw at them, they could live in a state of peace. No one, not even Satan himself, could take that peace away.

How many times in our lives do we let Satan take that peace away? How many times is he successful? How many times do we let doubt cripple us? It crippled the disciples. They are scared and frightened. If they are not in a state of peace, how can they possibly do his work? Jesus says to them: **"Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."** **"Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."** They needed to know that their sins were forgiven. They needed to know that they weren't alone. The Holy Spirit would work change in their hearts so that they could go out and tell others about the forgiveness they have in Jesus. It is that Gospel message that makes us able to say the words that we just sung: *"I know that my Redeemer lives."* *Not I think. Not I hope. Maybe he lives. But I KNOW.* Perhaps that is why that hymn means so much to so many people. I don't have a dead Jesus. If that were so, what good would that be? We have Jesus who is alive and says to every one of us today: **"Peace be with you!"**

Have you ever gone swimming in a lake or a pool that is perfectly calm? Then you jump in and do this giant cannon ball. (I can make a pretty good size one.) The ripples spread out away from you. Then wait for a while. The calm water is restored. Everything is at peace again. That's what Jesus wanted his disciples to know. That is what he restored on the cross – peace with God. That is the message he wanted them to carry out to the world. He just wants them to be confident and to be at peace. Simply, he wants his disciples to believe him, and by believing have life in his name.

At that moment in time, both on Easter Eve and a week later, they probably didn't get the whole meaning of the words that Jesus spoke. I'm sure that later they would look back to this conversation with Jesus after he rose and get what he was saying in those simple words. That is what the resurrection does. It changes everything. I don't always get what God is doing in my life. But I have the promise that he goes with me. He goes with you.

Do you ever doubt? If so, then listen to the simple words of Jesus. **"Peace be with you." "Stop doubting and believe." Believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."** That simple Gospel promise turned these disciples from being fearful men into confessing believers. Don't let doubt cripple you. That simple trust in Jesus gave these men courage. That simple trust in Jesus gives us courage. Trust him, and like the doubting Thomas of our text, all we can say is: **"My Lord and my God."** Amen.