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*Our task as Christians is somehow to live our lives with two realities in front of us – Jesus on the cross and Jesus off the cross. Jesus on the cross reminds us that this world brings tribulation -- and that Jesus hung there both to forgive all of our own cooperations with tribulation and to break the hold tribulation itself has. The empty cross tells us that Christ's suffering -- and the world's despair -- ended on Easter morning when God beat death in Jesus' body.* These words were written by the late Archbishop of the Anglican Catholic Church, John Cahoon. Bp. Cahoon accurately summed up the struggle that every sincere Christian faces in the world today, that in this world we will have tribulation, we will have to fight with sin, all the while remembering that Jesus has overcome it all on Easter morning.

The same was true for the Disciples, we find them in this morning's Gospel hiding behind locked doors from the authorities on that first Easter Sunday evening. At that moment Jesus Crucified was their only reality. That first Easter Day was still a dark day for the disciples, it was a day of confusion, of rumors too good to be true, that the tomb was empty, that Jesus had appeared to Mary Magdalene, that white robed strangers had appeared saying that Jesus was risen from the dead. And still the disciples hide, not sure what to think or who to trust, and then suddenly Jesus is standing in their midst. They can hardly believe their eyes, the Risen Lord does not say to them, *its ok, Im alright*. He says instead, *Peace be unto you*, not once, but twice, then He shows them His hands and His side. Jesus suddenly appears in their hiding place, in the midst of a world of tribulation and shows them his scars, physical proof that it is really Him, the tokens of peace that surpasses all understanding. Then He shows them the spiritual proof that it is really Him. He breathes on them, and says *Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained*. Proof that the world's despair over sin and death are ended forever.

In breathing upon the disciples and charging them *to receive the Holy Ghost* and promising them that *whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain are retained*, He was preparing them to be messengers of God's peace in a world of tribulation. Their task, as Bp. Cahoon says, which is now our task, was to live out their faith in the Risen Lord, in a world that reminded them constantly of all the reasons why it was necessary for Jesus to be crucified. They were called to be Apostles, to live out this faith, in a world that could not accept that Jesus had died for them, in a world that could not accept that Jesus

had risen from the dead, in a world that could not believe that sin, death and the grave had been defeated once and for all. They were called to spread the message of peace in a hard and cruel world, showing all through their very lives, *that he that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.*

We are called to live lives that reflect Jesus Christ. Constantly reminded of Jesus on the Cross, that living in this world will bring us tribulation, that we will have to do battle with and overcome sin, allowing Jesus to break the hold that the tribulation of the world has over us. All the while, looking back to the empty tomb, to the empty cross, to the Resurrected Lord, who has given His apostles, His bishops and priests the power to remit and retain sins. He has given His Church the power to go into the world absolving as many as will turn from the sinfulness of the world and believe in Him from their sins. To release them from their bonds of sin, so that as many as hear His voice can enter into the joy of salvation. So that all may experience their own resurrection with Him at the Last Day.

We are called to live lives that show the power of the Resurrected Lord to the world. We are called to be courageous, to be people of faith. We are called to be different, to be set apart, a holy people, and icons of Christ. For as many as are baptized are called to be partakers of *the victory that overcometh the world*. We are bearers of *the peace that surpasses all understanding*. *Peace be unto you*, that very same peace that Jesus breathed on the Apostles, even amid their doubts and fears, even amid a world of turmoil and tribulation. What a commission Jesus calls us to. What witnesses Jesus has sent us into the world to be. And all the while, He reminds us that this is not just the work of bishops, priests, and deacons, but of every man, woman, and child baptized into the life of Christ and Christ's Church and sealed with the Holy Spirit.

This Easter Season let us remember our calling to be people of faith. That like St. Thomas, you and I can say, *My Lord and My God*. Because of this living faith that has been breathed into us by the Holy Spirit, let us accept the commission that Christ our Lord gives to us this day to be reconcilers. Let us forgive the sins of those who sin against us. Let us be messengers of the peace of Jesus Christ. May this be our prayer as we offer our sacrifice of *...ourselves, our souls, and bodies* to the Father this day. Amen.