**Text: John 20:19-31**

**19On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” 20After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. 21Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” 22And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. 23If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”**

**24Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. 25So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “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.” 26A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” 27Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.” 28Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!” 29Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” 30Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. 31But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.**

Peace be with you! This was the very first thing our risen Lord Jesus said to his disciples as he appeared to them that Easter evening. Peace be with you! It was a message they desperately needed to hear. At that moment, many of them didn’t have any peace. It was Easter evening. They were hiding behind closed doors, locked doors, terrified for their lives. The Jewish leaders had killed their teacher, their Savior, Jesus, that they had come to put their faith in. Who would be next on the hit list? The disciples didn’t have any peace when it came to concerns about their safety.

Even worse than that is the lack of peace that they would have felt spiritually. They believed in Jesus as their Savior. They had seen the miraculous signs Jesus had done that had pointed to Him as being God’s Messiah. And now he’s dead. And yes, they had heard the reports from the women who went and saw the empty tomb, and they had talked to those disciples on the road to Emmaus who had claimed to see the risen Lord Jesus, but if that was the case, where is he?

Right here apparently! Jesus appears among them, using the power he has as true God. Locked doors aren’t an issue for him. But even that doesn’t give them peace right away. In Luke’s gospel, we’re told the disciples were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. Perhaps a ghost who was upset with them. After all, what had the disciples done the last time they were all together? Ran away in the Garden of Gethsemane – leaving Jesus to be arrested and crucified.

But no – Jesus isn’t a ghost. He showed them his hands, his side. He ate some fish in front of them. And he said **“Peace be with you!”** The disciples’ emotions turn from startled and frightened to joy and amazement. **Peace be with you** – The disciples were forgiven for running away in the garden. That sin is remembered no more. **Peace be with you**. All other sins are remembered no more - You are at peace with God because Jesus accomplished the work of redemption he came to do. **Peace be with you.** This peace gave these men who had hidden themselves behind closed doors, the boldness and confidence to proclaim Christ crucified to others despite what might happen. Because no matter what would happen, no matter what sufferings they would endure for the cross, heaven would be all that much greater. **Peace be with you.** The Peace Jesus proclaimed to them he also provided by his death and resurrection. However, that was a peace that not all of Jesus disciples enjoyed right away.

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This is how Thomas earned the nickname that stuck with him through the centuries, “Doubting Thomas.” A nickname that even many non-Christians are familiar with, and that many people use in everyday conversation. “Don’t be such a doubting Thomas.”

Because of that, I always felt kind of bad for Thomas. But I think that’s because I can see so much of myself in him. Perhaps you do too. Like Thomas, and really like the other disciples too because they did the same thing the week before, we fall into the sins of doubting our Lord’s promises. Like Thomas, we would love some visual proof. If God allowed some of his angels to come and share his word, wouldn’t that help things? Maybe he could make manna rain from the heavens, or just speak for a few seconds and tell everyone that Jesus is the way to eternal life. Perhaps he could show me how much he cares for me like he tells me he does in his word.

The truth is, we’re all doubting Thomas. At least we’ve all fallen into the same sins of doubting God’s providence and promises to us. What’s interesting is that all those proofs I listed that we might like to see, are all things God already has publicly done. He has allowed angels to come and share his word. **“A Savior has been born to you – he is Christ the Lord.” “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, he has risen just as he said.”** God has had food rain from the sky for his Old Testament people. He has spoken and publicly told us that Jesus is the way to eternal life. **“This is my Son, whom I love, listen to him!”**

And he absolutely has shown you how much he cares for you with the cross and empty tomb. On the cross Jesus took away our sins. Our sins of doubt, like Thomas and the other disciples had. Our sins of fear and hesitancy at proclaiming his word. Every sin that gets in the way of our relationship with God and takes away our peace with him. Jesus crucified those sins with him on the cross. And because of that, now our risen Lord Jesus tells us Peace be with you. You are at peace, because through faith in Jesus Christ, your sins are forgiven.

Jesus didn’t have to, but he came back and proclaimed that peace to Thomas. He didn’t have to, but he chose to give Thomas the visual proofs that Thomas had asked for. **“A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.” Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”**

Jesus in his grace showed love for Thomas and gave him the visual signs that he wanted to see. But as he did so, he also gave Thomas and us a reminder about faith: **“Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”** Jesus reminds us faith isn’t based in sight; it’s based in hearing the Word of God. **Faith comes from hearing the message and the Message is heard through the word of Christ.**

That’s a wonderful truth for us as 21st Century Christians, because it means that we are not lacking anything that we need for faith. We might think of the Centurion’s question to Paul – What must I do to be saved? The answer? **“Believe, and you will be saved.”** Not believe and do this to help earn your salvation, not believe and see, so that you really have a leg up. No not do, not see, just believe. In fact, in this Jesus calls us blessed. **“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”** We are blessed. We are blessed because we heard the word of God and the Holy Spirit worked faith in our hearts.

In fact, John concludes the chapter by saying this is the entire reason he wrote this book. **“Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”**

Did you catch the word John used to describe the things Jesus did? John used the word signs. He could have used the word miracles, but he didn’t. He used the word signs. And there’s a reason for that. A sign’s job is to draw your attention to something else. Jesus miracles were signs that pointed to him as the promised Savior. We looked at the greatest sign last Sunday – the empty tomb. Proof that Jesus accomplished the work of redemption he came to do. Proof that our sins are forgiven. The reason that Jesus can tell us **“Peace be with you.”**

That peace is one that only Jesus can give to us and that the world cannot take away from us. It’s a peace we can have even when other aspects of our lives are not at peace. It’s a peace that motivates us and enables us to do things that might seem intimidating or frightening at first. In these verses, Jesus shares one of those things with us – the ministry of the keys.  **And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. 23If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”**

We call this the ministry of the keys because elsewhere Jesus gives the picture of locking or unlocking the door to heaven. Essentially, the ministry of the keys is just sharing with others what God has already revealed to us in his law and gospel. If someone is repentant of their sin, that is, they are sorry they committed the sin, they sincerely want to change their sinful life, and they trust in Jesus as their Savior, Jesus says the door to heaven is unlocked. Be at peace, your sins are forgiven.

If someone is not repentant of their sin, that is they are not sorry for it, they don’t think they need forgiveness for it, they don’t intend to change it, Jesus says that door to heaven is locked. The ministry of the keys is a pronunciation of God’s law and gospel. It’s something that Jesus has commissioned all Christians to do, just like his great commission, **“Go make disciples.”**

Yes, both of those commissions can be intimidating, but remember that Jesus has equipped you. He has first given you his peace. Now he asks you to share that news of peace with others. Just like the disciples this is something we can be very eager to do.

No matter what happens, we are at peace with God. Heaven is our home. Jesus is our brother. And as we tell others about the forgiveness of sins through our risen Lord Jesus, through the work of the Holy Spirit, God’s family will grow. More will come to know that peace that Jesus brings. The peace that Jesus proclaims to you. Your sins are forgiven. Be at peace. Amen.