

Second Sunday of Easter + Quasimodo Geniti

April 11, 2021

John 20:19-31

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

It's the evening of the first day of the week in today's Gospel, it's the evening of the first Easter, and the disciples are now assembled behind closed doors, except for Thomas. The locked doors provide security from the world, protecting them from the Jews who remain hostile towards followers of Jesus. Outwardly, this group appears safe and at peace, but inwardly, it's a different story.

Their lives are in chaos, their souls are in deep distress. The death of Jesus sent the disciples into a tailspin; it rocked them, leaving them searching for peace in the world and peace in their lives. None of this was how things were supposed to go...

You can sympathize with the disciples. You, too, have experienced moments like this, where externally, you look great – even strong, but internally, it's a living hell.

The United States military is often seen as a measuring stick for culture or a mirror of today's world. Soldiers, Marines, Sailors, and Airmen are sent and placed in the most hellish places throughout the globe, fighting battles against our nation's enemies. They are pillars of confidence and strength. But, upon returning home to the United States, many believe they are now safe; they are locked behind the safety of their front door. In some cases, and situations, this couldn't be further from the truth. Dive past the external appearance of strength and calmness of a military member to the inner confines of the heart and the actual war rages due to the loss of battle buddies, broken relationships, or the simple reality that war is unnatural.

A regrettable reality is that this past year of isolation has seen continued increases in suicides among military members, numbers that surpass those of a pandemic. Suppose you were to survey the United States of America. In that case, many states and commonwealths have similar numbers to the military: sad, distressing, and representative of a world that is in constant tension and war with itself.

Like the disciples and often the military member, the actual war, the true battle for you, is within your heart.

The world desires to quiet the war through governmental programs, law enforcement, or the very might of militaries. Economic growth, healthcare, and retirement plans are another means where we place our trust and desire safety and peace. Even the Church falls into these types of traps. But, properly speaking, these are gifts from God and can also lead us into the delusional belief that we are safe and secure within this life.

For you today, just as He did for the disciples, Jesus comes and says the only thing that will ever truly matter, *"Peace to you."* It is far more than a wishful greeting. Instead, it's a pronouncement of what Jesus gives to you. Jesus enters the room where His disciples have barricaded themselves. He comes to them with His Word, and when Jesus says, *"Peace to you,"* He gives it to them.

It's these words that deliver the benefits of what Christ accomplished for you upon the cross. On Good Friday, the war was fought upon the battlefield of Calvary; Jesus suffered and endured the pangs of death, declaring with a cry, *"It is finished."* Yet, the angels announce on Easter morning, *"He is risen!"* His rising on Easter now says death no longer wins, the grave no longer wins, sin no longer prevails. In reality, you cannot have the cross without the rising of Easter morning, and that first Easter evening, Jesus comes to where the Church on earth is gathered, behind locked doors and announces to them the benefits of His victory, His peace.

If you are like me, you, too, would desire this lasting peace in your life. Your life is a mess; you miss your loved ones you haven't seen in months, maybe years. You miss those who have been placed into the grave. Your heart is in turmoil with fits of anger and outrage with the government or your neighbor. You experience the dark places of this life because of bouts of envy, depression, and despair. Thoughts of dying ravage your mind. Thoughts of becoming ill distress you.

All these things imprison you. Yet, Jesus does come to you, behind the fortified walls of anger, the built-up hills of mistrust, the pits of depression, and through the pastors He has sent to care for you, He announces the glad tidings of forgiveness and peace.

Today, pastors continue to be sent as Christ's messengers to announce this forgiveness to you. This is what absolution is all about at the beginning of the Divine Service. God the Son breaks down the walls you have erected, and through the pastor, He declares to you, *"I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."* This is God's declaration of peace to you.

Today's Gospel sets forth a pattern of worship for the Church. Jesus comes to the Church on earth that first Easter evening, on the first day of the week, on Sunday. He announces grace and forgiveness. The pattern continues today as we gather around His Word of resurrection and receive His presence through His flesh and blood.

But we struggle in another way, don't we? We struggle as we depart the church with the sin of doubt and unbelief. For instance, in today's military, a Soldier is taught that success depends upon them, the mission depends upon them. Even in my workouts at

home, the virtual trainer says to me over and over and over again – only you can dig deep enough, only you can make the decision, only you...

If it all relies upon me, we are in a heap of trouble.

Thomas was in a bit of a situation; he wasn't there when Jesus first appeared to the disciples. Thomas said, *"Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."* Some pious Christians may want to chastise Thomas for his lack of faith, but don't we also demonstrate similar unbelief by our doubts and sins?

The Scriptures attest to the eyewitness testimony, so you may believe. At the end of our reading today, John wrote, *"These [things] 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."*

Your faith is objective; the evidence you need for faith, to believe these things, is written in the Scriptures by the eyewitnesses of Jesus' life and ministry, those who witnessed His death on Good Friday, and the multitudes that saw with their own eyes the risen Lord. Faith does not rely on the subjective nature of emotions or feelings but on God's most holy Word.

What's this mean for you this day?

The world around us is at war with itself. We are at war within ourselves. But, just as Jesus not only appeared to the disciples, He returned to appear to Thomas as well, and He appeared to many others in the days and weeks that would come. Today, He appears and presents Himself to you and for you.

In the sequence hymn for the Gospel, *"Christians to the Paschal Victim,"* we sang, *"Christ is arisen; From the grave's dark prison."*

But, Luther provides this translation, *"Christ is risen from all His agony."* Christ is risen from all His torments.

As you prepare to depart this day and walk through the days before you this week, remember this – Jesus entered the battlefield of this life, He suffered your internal agony, all the torments of Satan that assault you, and He defeated them, for you.

So, gather together this day, hear the Word of truth, receive with your mouth the true flesh and blood for the forgiveness of your sins, and as you depart - permit the peace of

God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus this day and forevermore (Phil 4:7). Amen. +INJ+

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Rev. Noah J. Rogness
Associate Pastor, Immanuel Evangelical-Lutheran Church
Alexandria, VA