

✠ I preach in God's name for God's people. Let my words be from God and for God's people. **Amen**

Alleluia. Christ is risen! **He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

Good morning.

Unrecognizable Jesus

The disciples did not recognize Jesus. This seems to be a feature of his after the resurrection. He seems to be unrecognizable until the breaking of the bread, a miraculous catch of fish, or here—in the marks of his crucifixion: the holes in his hands and side.

The gathered disciples do not expect to see Jesus, even though the women have told them that he is risen and that he is coming. Even though the women have told them this, they do not yet believe.

Resurrection Rejection

As we heard on Easter Sunday, the guards, the women, the priests and the disciples, and at last—Thomas—heard that Jesus has risen from the dead. The guards and the women heard from the angels; the priests heard from the guards; the disciples heard from the women; and Thomas heard from the disciples. The guards chose money; the priests chose deception; all the rest refuse belief, at first. But, when Jesus appears to the women, then the disciples, then the disciple Thomas—and when he reveals that he is Jesus—then they believe.

Absent Thomas

Our story begins on the evening of his resurrection, while his disciples were gathered. The ten apostles are there. Judas has gone his own way. Thomas isn't around. The door is locked.

A locked door makes no difference to Jesus. What could stand in the way of him who conquered death, he who through whom the world was made? In entering that locked room, Jesus exercises his authority as King of Creation. Neither the stone-sealed tomb nor this locked door have any power over Jesus; Jesus has power, quite literally, over every single thing.

What will the risen Lord Jesus do with his disciples?

The Risen King

We might falsely think that Jesus might be angry that his disciples, whom he went to the cross for, abandoning him. We might suppose that Jesus would barge in, demanding them make amends to him. It's the sort of thing we would be prone to do— isn't it? But Jesus *knew* that his disciples would scatter; he quotes Scripture prophesying it. None of this is a surprise, and now that death is defeated, Jesus has begun the work of getting his creation in order. It's spring cleaning time throughout his cosmos.

And so, the first order of business is to visit his disciples. He comes to them not out of anger, not even to chastise them, but because he loves them, and he has work for them to do.

We do not quite know how he got in—just that the doors were locked and that he was, in spite of that fact, now among them. Did he wave his hand and unlock the doors? (I doubt it; the text says nothing about him *unlocking* the doors.) Did he simply pass through the door? Or through the wall? Did he simply appear?

However Jesus did it, he did it not as a spirit or as a ghost, but as himself—fully man, fully God. It's critical to our faith to understand that we will not be *merely* spirits in the resurrection that is to come. We will, like our Lord Jesus, have bodies. And just as his disciples do not quite recognize him just by his appearance, neither, it seems, will our appearances be quite the same as they are here and now. We, too, will be changed.

The Passing of the Peace

NOW that Jesus has come to his disciples—right in their midst—what is the first thing Jesus does? The first thing he says to them? “Peace be with you.”

This is not simply a greeting. Jesus is not merely saying, “hello.” “Good afternoon” and “Peace be with you” are not interchangeable expressions. They mean different things. Jesus means exactly what he has said.

Jesus is the Christ and the Son of God, the one who before their eyes died on the cross, and has now come to them in a locked room. There is no one more powerful; and here he is, among them. He is the one to whom we must give an account, at the end of this age.

Isn't it marvelous to know *in advance* what favor he bestows upon his disciples? And by extension, upon us? Isn't it powerful and incredible to know that the ruling Jesus offers on the last day is peace to you and to me?

The disciples haven't earned this favor; they haven't earned this peace. And yet, before anything else is said or done, Jesus gives it to them. They have the peace of Jesus—the peace Jesus won for them—and for you and for me—on the cross.

So, too, our liturgy has this peace built-in.

When we share the peace with one another before Holy Communion, it is not a mere greeting. It is not simply an introvert's worst nightmare, to try to avoid as many people as possible who may want to say a friendly, “hello!” Nor is it an extrovert's time to shine, to try to greet as many people as possible. That's not what takes place during the peace. What takes place is Christ's body offering Christ's peace to one another.

This is one reason we share the peace *before* we come together as his united body to partake of his own body and blood. As Christ's own body, we are at peace with one another.

We are, in no uncertain terms, offering the forgiveness of God to those whom we share peace. It's for this very reason that I make every effort to share the peace with every single person—not to say, “hello,” but to share the peace of Jesus with every single person. For that is what Jesus offers.

Introverts need not be afraid of this time—nor should extroverts take advantage of this time—because we are not simply greeting one another. There are, on a Sunday morning, plenty of other times for regular greetings.

A couple of consequences follow: (1) if there is someone whom *you* need to forgive, and you don't offer the peace to them, you're making poor use of this opportunity for peace with one another. (2) And if there is someone from whom you need forgiveness, then again—exchange the peace with that person.

“Peace be with you.” Jesus tells them twice. He who does not waste words, finds it worthwhile to repeat himself. Once *before* they recognize him; once *after* they recognize him.

The Marks

What makes the disciples recognize him?
The marks in his hands and in his side.

He remains—for all time—the crucified Lord. Will his hands and side ever heal? We will want to change how we think about these injuries to him. They are not marks of shame, or marks of pain, but marks of his very glory—they are his glorious adornments.

The marks of his love poured out for his people in death show—quite literally—his beauty, his glory, his love. When we look upon him with faith—and at the end of this world when we are glorified with him—we shall see how beautiful these marks are.

The disciples have the great privilege of seeing these marks. And when they, at last, see that the crucified Jesus is the same as this man—the risen Jesus—who stands among them—they *rejoice*.

To make this explicit: this is not wish fulfillment on the part of the disciples. The priests, remember, expected that the disciples would try a hoax, try to steal the body of Jesus away, try to make the world *think* that Jesus rose from the dead just as he said.

But as I emphasized repeatedly Easter Sunday: the women and the disciples just did not take Jesus' words to heart. They didn't expect him to die (even though he told them!) and then they didn't expect him to rise from the dead (even though he told them!).

John tells us all of this to the shame of the disciples—to his own shame. They should have expected Jesus to have risen from the dead; they should have been at the tomb at dawn; but no—as messenger after messenger told them that Jesus had risen, they rejected messenger after messenger, and continued in doubt and sorrow.

If the man who has come into their midst is a ghost or a spirit, that would be a terror for them. If the man who has come into their midst simply *pretends* to be Jesus, that is even worse.

There can be no rejoicing unless the man who stands among them is actually Jesus. And he is Jesus, for *Alleluia, Christ is risen, he is risen indeed, alleluia!* just as he told them—and the holes in his hands and his side *prove* he is Jesus and therefore reveal his love for his disciples.

The Sending

Now begins the ministry of the apostles: “Jesus said to them again, ‘As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.’”

It's thanks to the apostolic ministry that this message—Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again—has made it to our ears and hearts and souls. It's thank to them that we have this very Gospel of John, along with the rest of the New Testament Scriptures. It's thanks to them that we have the core of our liturgy—like the *passing of the peace*, but also—the *sending*.

For just as the Father sent Jesus, and as Jesus sent his apostles, and as his apostles appointed others who were sent, down through the ages, and now to me, so with this same authority at the close of each service I send you back into the world—you to be the ministers of Christ in your homes and work and all the rest.

The whole of what Jesus does in this upper room with his disciples is liturgical. We see it in this very service.

The Gift of the Spirit

The world is being recreated through the ministry of the gospel. It's a bold, but nevertheless true claim. For what does Jesus do for his apostles next?

And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

We immediately think back to the very first time our Lord did this. And that was long ago, at the foundation of the world, when he made man:

[7] Then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. (Genesis 2:7, ESV)

The primary gift of the Holy Spirit is *life*. The Holy Spirit means that we are born of God, that we have become his *living* children.

Long ago, after we were made, after our Lord breathed on us, after we had become *living*, we sinned—and we began to die.

The gift of the Holy Spirit is explicitly connected with the forgiveness and absolution of God.

The Gift of Absolution

Everything that Christ did on earth showed that he had the power to forgive sins—even his death. “So that you know the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins: “Rise, take up your bed, and walk.” Or, remember, from the cross, Jesus said: “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.”

Jesus now bestows this same power of forgiveness on his disciples:

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

This same power—the same authority—is what gives me the ability to pronounce the words of absolution, and this same authority is what gives any of us reason to believe that our sins really are forgiven during the confession and absolution. For this is the place where the absolution comes from.

Through forgiveness, through his Spirit, through the death and resurrection of Jesus, God has returned *life* to us—his very life.

The Return of Thomas

Thomas returns the second Sunday after Easter. (The counting can be a little confusing, since it does say “eight days later,” but what is meant is eight days after the crucifixion.) Thomas is the last of the eleven to believe. But he also the last of the eleven to see Jesus.

We do not know where he is or where he has been. I do think he should have been with the rest of the disciples. But we simply do not know where he was or what he has been doing. We know only that at last he has come.

He had told the disciples that he would not believe unless he put his finger in the holes in Jesus’ hands and side. And Jesus knows he has said that; he knows all things. And so, very graciously, Jesus offers him just this opportunity.

We don’t know if Thomas took him up on it. Did Jesus grab his finger and place it in his side as he said these words? Did he reveal his side and point to it? Whatever did take place gave Thomas the faith to exclaim: “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.”

It’s because of Thomas that we know that we—yes, you and me—are blessed by our Lord Jesus. And it’s because of John that we have any of this recorded.

For John wrote these things exactly for the benefit of those who will not see the risen Lord Jesus until the day when he comes again to judge the living and the dead.

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.

Let us therefore continue to believe, continue to keep the faith, continue to rejoice, continue to receive the forgiveness of sins, continue to go out from here into the world with the power of the gospel, that the crucified Lord Jesus Christ is risen.

Alleluia. Christ is risen. **He is risen indeed. Alleluia!**

Christ the Lord is worthy of all worship and praise and glory and honor and majesty, now and forever. **Amen and amen.**