

First Sunday after Easter

April 8, 2018

Matthew Ude

**John 20:19-31** <sup>19</sup> Then, the same day at evening, being the first *day* of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace *be* with you." <sup>20</sup> When He had said this, He showed them *His* hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup> So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." <sup>22</sup> And when He had said this, He breathed on *them*, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the *sins* of any, they are retained." <sup>24</sup> Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord." So he said to them, "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." <sup>26</sup> And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!" <sup>27</sup> Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand *here*, and put *it* into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing." <sup>28</sup> And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" <sup>29</sup> Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed *are* those who have not seen and *yet* have believed." <sup>30</sup> And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; <sup>31</sup> but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

### Go In The Peace of Forgiveness

If I asked you what was written in large letters on a hill overlooking Hollywood California, I think most of you could answer without hesitation. But how many could answer if I asked the same of a hill overlooking Chennai, India. It's not as big or as obvious, but it's definitely there, the famous words of Thomas from our text today, "My Lord and My God."

We like to think of Thomas as doubting Thomas. Those words and the fact that they are there in on a hill in India, however paint a picture of a man of great faith and conviction. A man who out of love for the Lord and the people He died for traveled far from home to spread the joyful news of sins forgiven and peace with God.

The words are there because many believe that is the very hill on which Thomas died. There are actually some very ancient churches in Japan which claim that Thomas did not die in India but made it even as far as Japan. The evidence is mostly on the side of the hill in India, but in either case the point

remains that Thomas made have doubted briefly (and honestly who among us wouldn't. But from then on his faith was strong and deep, as well as his love for the Lord and all people.

Even the word's themselves show this. He declared Him to be **God**. He declared Him to be **My God**, but most importantly he declared Him to be **My Lord**.

What inspired not only Thomas but all the apostles and others as well, such as Mark and Luke, to so dedicate their lives to the work Jesus had given them. To travel to far distant lands to proclaim the message He had given to them.

The immediate impetus in our text is of course the resurrection. They saw the Lord alive after three days dead in the grave and they rejoiced. But our text also implies that this in itself is not the fullness of their joy. This in itself was not enough to send them out into the world boldly confessing Christ.

Did you notice that a week after Resurrection Sunday, a week after they had seen Him alive, the door is still locked? They were still hiding in fear.

Despite Thomas' wonderful words of faith and fealty, neither he nor the other disciples were really quite ready to head out and confront the world and the Jewish leaders. In fact 40 days later, what was the very last thing the disciples asked Jesus before He ascended into heaven? "Lord will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"

Even after everything that happened they still thought that Jesus had come to bring earthly honor, power and riches. After everything that happened they still had their heart set on earthly things and an earthly kingdom.

No wonder they were hiding in fear. Even while they were looking around wondering where the palaces and armies were the true gift of Jesus resurrection had already been given to them. In fact it was the first thing that Jesus gave to them, the first thing He said to them on the first Easter Sunday. "Peace to you!"

A peace which the Lord himself explained,

**Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. John 14:27**

The only type of peace the world will ever know comes at the point of a gun. But the peace which the Lord gives is the peace of knowing that your sins are forgiven, that Christ is risen from the dead, and because Christ is risen we can let go of this world, there is a better one waiting.

As Luther said it best, "**Take they our life, goods, fame, child, and wife, let these all be gone, they still have nothing won, the kingdom our remaineth.**"

The truth of what Christ had given to them in those words and through His resurrection was something they did not understand until the Holy Spirit opened their eyes. Then however they truly rejoiced in His resurrection.

Most of us are probably not any better. How many of us look forward to Easter morning because of the Ham and the chocolate and the Easter egg hunts and the gathering of the family? And how many of us look forward to Easter because of the message of Peace and forgiveness that Christ's resurrection brings us?

Although the choir sounded wonderful, the rest of the service last Sunday did not go quite the way I was hoping. I apologize for that. But even a service that isn't as joyful as we might like, should not be able to overshadow the joy of what Christ tells us here. **"Peace to you!"** It is the joy of that sentence which caused Thomas to travel to the eastern edge of India proclaiming, "I know that my Redeemer lives."

Jesus knows that this is our reason for rejoicing and the one thing of value that we have to share with the World; therefore He gave His disciples what they needed to share this same peace with others.

**He breathed on *them*, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the *sins* of any, they are retained."**

We usually refer to this as the "Keys." We call them this authority the "Keys" because just as a key can lock or unlock the door to your house, so it is through this method that we lock or unlock the way to heaven.

Notice the unlocking is done through the preaching of the forgiveness of sins, as we just did this morning for little Haylie Denson. In the waters of baptism her sins, which are many, were forgiven and the door to heaven opened to her. The same peace which Jesus spoke to his disciples was given to her.

Notice also that Jesus speaks here to all His disciples. Even if at another point He was talking to Peter, here He is clearly speaking to them all and probably not just the 12 either. So this is not a gift that only the pope or even only pastors have.

This is the hope and joy that lives in all of us. And Christ gives to all of us this power, this authority, to share this same joy with others. That is to forgive the sins of any who repentant and turn to Jesus, to give to them the peace of Easter evening.

Unfortunately Jesus knows that it is also necessary to give us authority to lock the kingdom. Not because He wants anyone excluded but because we must warn those who are not on the right road. Many of course would tell us that we are unkind and unloving to tell people that because of their refusal to repent they are not forgiven. But that of course is nonsense. It is loving to warn people when they are headed for hell.

My ministry would be a whole lot easier if I didn't care. Just let people do what they want and if they show up to church good, if they don't' that's their choice. But instead Christ has told me and you also as a congregation to use the keys to warn those who are headed for hell.

Jesus does not want them to end up there. He wants them to turn and repent and go to heaven.

John tells us at the end of our text that it is for this very reason that he wrote His entire Gospel, so that we who weren't there to see these things for ourselves might still believe and receive this same peace. John reminds us of the same thing in our Epistle reading this morning.

So does that make us better than the apostles? After all Jesus says, "**Blessed are those who have not seen but believe.**"

But I don't think Jesus is making a distinction here between those who saw Him after his resurrection and the rest of us. I think He is making a distinction between those who have that child like faith in God's word. "**Jesus loves me this I know for the bible tells me so.**" And those of us who might have a hard time believing without the evidence of our eyes.

If this is the distinction we make than I'm sure I'm more on the side with Thomas. I'm always reading about carbon dating and dendrochronology etc trying to make Christ's resurrection a matter of science and evidence. But that way is always shaky ground that way is that foundation of sand. Far better far more secure to build your house on the rock, to simply have faith that God's word is truth.

In either case however, nothing changes this one fact: We have peace with God. We have peace with God, because our sins are forgiven, and we know this is true because Jesus rose from the dead.

Amen

**The peace of God that surpasses all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.**