

2nd Sunday of Easter
April 19, 2020
Scripture Readings & Sermon

FIRST READING: Acts 5:29-42 ESV

29 But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men. 30 The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. 31 God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. 32 And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”

33 When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them. 34 But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in honor by all the people, stood up and gave orders to put the men outside for a little while. 35 And he said to them, “Men of Israel, take care what you are about to do with these men. 36 For before these days Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. 37 After him Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him. He too perished, and all who followed him were scattered. 38 So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail; 39 but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!” So they took his advice, 40 and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. 41 Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. 42 And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.

EPISTLE: 1 PETER 1:3-9 ESV

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, 5 who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 8 Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, 9 obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

HOLY GOSPEL: JOHN 20:19-31 ESV

19 On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” 20 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad

when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." 22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."

24 Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."

26 Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." 28 Thomas answered him, "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."

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.

Sermon 17 – Second Sunday of Easter

"Thomas The Unbelief Engine"

John 20:19-30

Dear friends,

Our Gospel lesson for this second Sunday of Easter features good old Thomas. You know all about Mr. Thomas, don't you? This guy didn't believe until he saw. We have this cute little nickname for him based on that, Doubting Thomas. What you see in Thomas is an excellent example of God taking something bad, someone who is just about as lost as they can get and turning it around for the benefit of all God's people. In Thomas' unbelief we find our salvation. Also, this text contains wonderful encouragement for us as church, which I'll deal with first.

"19 On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." The disciples are to be commended for their social distancing, but unlike today they are doing this to avoid catching the attention of the authorities. The disciples are doing the equivalent of

what a cat does after he knocks something fragile and valuable off your shelf. They're putting out the best "nothing to see here, nothing has happened, please God don't notice me" act that they can. They think the Jewish authorities are going to kick in that door any second, which makes Jesus' words here especially striking. Jesus says, "peace be with you," sure, but He is not greeting them. He's making a declaration. He's telling them what just happened. Jesus is essentially telling them what is happening by appearing to them from the dead. Peace *is with you*, disciples. I am with you, and I am alive, and so peace is with you, because you have peace with God.

Peace is something I've personally been seeking for years. It would take too long to explain why, but peace isn't something I have in my life and haven't for a long time, and it drives me crazy. Maybe you feel the same way, maybe you don't, but the peace Jesus is offering here isn't a subjective one, which seems like it makes it functionally useless. If you don't feel at peace, what's the point of telling me I have it, Jesus? Jesus reminds us how limited that way of viewing things that is, but it is something we sinners do all the time. We live in a time of great unrest, socially, economically, politically. This is a time charged with ugliness, hatred, and death on an international scale. Yet Jesus' words here ring just as true but sound just as false.

Remember the disciples think they're dead meat. They think that the moment the Jewish authorities sniff them out and/or remember they exist, that they're going to be exiled, imprisoned, or executed. These are men living like fugitives who have just lost the hope that's sustained them for the past three years. They think Jesus is dead, they've heard some confusing reports about an empty tomb, but dead is dead and they know this. Then here's Jesus again, and He's saying that peace is theirs.

It is also yours and mine. The peace that Jesus wins is a peace that goes beyond anything that happens in this world. It is the peace between God and men, that God is no longer angry with man for

man's sins. That God is no longer angry with you for your sins, and in that spirit I tell you, saints of Bethel, that peace is with you. God has taken your sins, He has pinned them to Jesus, He has poured out His anger on that same Jesus, and He has raised that Jesus from the dead. That means that when God looks at you He is happy with you. He is proud of you. You and God are okay, which means your future is secure, your home in heaven awaits you at your end.

That's not the peace I want. I don't know if you feel the same way. I want peace here. I want it now. That's not what Jesus promises, and that makes it hard to swallow, because I have no appetite for it. Peace to come is not peace now which means it might as well never be. It's a childish view, I know, but sin is like that. Jesus has a response for this, but in true Jesus fashion the response is a little less than straightforward.

“20 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” 22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”

If these words seem strange after the whole “peace be with you,” I understand, they sure seem that way. But this is all connected. Jesus first appears to tell them that peace is done. He did it. Then He passes that peace with God into the hands of the disciples and tasks them with sharing it. We talk about the Great Commission in Matthew a lot when thinking of the church's beginnings, but this is where it starts. This is where our new life starts as church, you and I, right here. These words. You forgive, sins are forgiven, you withhold, sins are withheld. That is our job. To dispense forgiveness in Jesus' name to those who want it, to those who are repentant. Jesus wins the peace, Jesus gives the peace, then we turn around and give it out in our church assemblies.

That's what we get on this earth. It's not what we want, its at least not what I want, but it is what Jesus gives. The peace of knowing that God doesn't hate us for our sins, that God doesn't begrudge us our mistakes, judge us harshly for everything we've hashed up in this world. That's fine, but it doesn't bleed through all the time, in this world there is still too much unrest, too much going on, to really relax. It's like trying to sit on sandpaper, something just rubs you wrong. In response to this, God gives us the church, and it doesn't fix it. Sometimes it doesn't fix it in any productive way at all, it seems so useless to the purpose that we want it to serve. It's not about peace here, its about eternity, and I know I talk about that a lot, but that's only because I'm trying to learn it.

That's exactly why we need it. God isn't here to give us what we want, He is here to give us what we need, and the whole point of church is to deepen our appetite for that peace that we truly need. We need God's forgiveness, we need God's kindness, and we need Him to be our God and we to be His people. The sinner in us doesn't want that, it wants a God who does what we want, and half the time what we want isn't unreasonable which makes it extra infuriating. But God is here to give us the peace of forgiveness, righteousness, and truth, and that peace seems so unfit to a world like this. It does, because it is. It isn't for this world, it is for the world to come, and God wants us to hunger for that.

Let's take a case study. Thomas isn't a classic case for this, in fact this whole analogy is kind of a stretch, but bear with me please. Thomas wants proof. He wants to know for sure. These are his words on that score: **“Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.”** Never ever no not ever believe. That's a harsh dismissal of the hope the disciples try to offer him. Thomas wants his proof, not the peace of the Word of God.

This isn't a great analogy because Thomas gets what he wants, and Jesus almost rebukes him for it. He tells Thomas that the ones who believe by hearing, you and I, we are blessed. Jesus allows Thomas' unbelief, and it is unbelief, don't gentle this, He allows it to stand because its testimony is a benefit to us. How so? Thomas shows us ourselves, at our rawest core, and Thomas shows us what happens when we stick to what we want. We become him. Angry. Rejecting God. Setting all kinds of conditions for God. Gotta tick these boxes, God, then I'm onboard, but until you do, no dice, no deal, nothing. It's sad. Bad examples teach us a lot, and Thomas is one of the worst. Don't do a Thomas. Listen to God's voice as He calls you to repent and believe. Listen to it when He tells you that He loves you. Answer that call by feeding yourselves on what He gives you. It isn't what we want. It's what we need. Heed that appetite, not the appetites that want things a certain way in the here and now. The more you feed it, dear brothers and sisters, the stronger it will grow. The more you feed that Christian self, the more it will come out. The more it will become you.

God's peace He leaves to you. Not the peace of the world. Not the peace of this life. It is the only thing that overcome our sinful selves. It is yours forever.

Amen.