

Quasimodogeniti Sermon (First Sunday after Easter)

April 3, 2016

John 20:19-31

Jesus Brings Peace

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When Jesus says, “Peace be with you” he is declaring a message from God. In fact, the very act of Christ rising from the dead is a message from God to us. “Peace be with you.” Whose peace? God’s peace! God’s peace includes forgiveness of sins, reconciliation, and eternal life. True peace with God. This is the message that Christ’s resurrection speaks and it is what he speaks to his disciples when he appears to them.

Thomas did not believe. He doubted that Christ rose from the dead. (Saying he doubted is putting it lightly). He said, “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.” Instead of calling him “doubting Thomas” we should call him “emphatically denying Thomas.” Yet Christ appears to him as well, not in anger, not in judgment, yet with the same message of peace from God. And Thomas, who had so forcefully insisted that he would never believe saw God’s peace. Not only did Christ speak the words, but he showed him the wounds by which the world was cured of sin and he bid him to feel where he was pierced for his transgressions.

In the wounds of the risen Christ we see God’s peace. We see that God is not angry with us, that he does not hate us, but loves us, forgives us, and accepts us as his own. And it is this proof that caused Thomas to answer, “My Lord and my God” confessing Christ Jesus to be who he is. Here Jesus shows his disciples what he meant when he said, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”

The peace Christ gives his disciples is a different kind of peace than the world can give. Christ gives peace between God and man. His death reconciles us to God. But this was not the peace his

disciples asked for. Before Jesus showed up, his disciples thirsted for peace. They were afraid, their doors were locked for fear of the Jews. They didn't have their mind on God's wrath toward sin. They weren't focusing on their own sinful condition, their unbelief, and their betrayal. They were afraid of the Jews. Men. People, who at best can hurt the body, but have no power over the soul. The disciples thirsted for peace with the world. Peace that the world would give. But Christ doesn't give them that. He gives them something immensely better: Peace with God.

What are you afraid of? What, metaphorically speaking, keeps you behind locked doors? Is it fear of losing your job? Getting enough time off for vacation? Sickness? Losing your good reputation among your friends? Being mocked and ridiculed? People hating you? Do you desire peace with the world? When we look at our priorities, our concerns we see that we've desired peace in the wrong place. Christ tells us that we won't have peace from this world. After he predicts his suffering and resurrection Jesus said to his disciples, "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

Jesus doesn't promise peace in the world. Rather, he promises tribulation. Yet, the peace God gives through Jesus is greater than any tribulation we will face. The disciples hid for fear of the Jews. This wasn't paranoia. The Jewish leaders murdered Jesus in the most gruesome way. The disciples feared their coming persecution. But when Christ came, they forgot their fears. They were overjoyed to see Christ and receive his message of peace from God. Yet, peace from the world didn't come. Over the next months and years after Christ's ascension his disciples were beaten, arrested, and murdered. What they had feared behind those locked doors came true and yet they did not fear it anymore. They did not fear, because the peace Jesus gave them was greater than all suffering in the world. The peace Jesus gave them overcame the world by giving them eternal life.

St. John wrote in our Epistle lesson, "And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?"

You'll still have to deal with bills. People will be mean—even persecute you for your faith. But by the peace that God gives you through Jesus' dying and resurrection, today's suffering cannot compare. In fact, all suffering will pass away. But God's peace will not pass away.

Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene. He showed himself to Peter and the other disciples, and to five hundred believers at one time. And Jesus showed Thomas his hands and his side telling him to put his hand in the marks of the nails and his pierced side. But we don't have that privilege. None of us has seen the risen Christ. So where can we receive this peace? Jesus says, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe." It is by faith that we overcome the world. It is by believing in Christ's suffering for our sins and his glorious resurrection that we receive eternal life that the world cannot take away. And faith comes by hearing Christ's word of peace. Thomas wasn't saved, because he saw the risen Christ. He was saved because he *believed* that Christ's resurrection gives him peace from God. There were many who saw the undeniable evidence that Christ rose from the dead. Yet even the soldiers who guarded his grave took bribe money instead of believing in Christ. Faith can only come through the power of God's word.

When Jesus delivered God's peace to his disciples, he didn't give it only to them. He delivered God's peace to his whole Church, to all who would believe in the peace proclaimed from those marked hands. Jesus said, "As the Father has sent me even so I am sending you. ... Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them. If you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld." The forgiveness of sins is peace with God. "Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the one against whom the LORD counts no iniquities." (Psalm 32:1) It is this peace that Jesus was sent by God the Father to proclaim. Isaiah prophesies of Christ, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, and to proclaim liberty to the captives." (Isaiah 61:1) So Christ after accomplishing everything his Father sent him to do and proclaiming the good news of peace through his resurrection, he gives this command also to his disciples. "Go and give peace, *my* peace through the

forgiveness of sins. Bind up the broken heart. Proclaim liberty to those captive to sin and death. Declare to them that God forgives them for my sake.”

You have not seen the risen Christ, but you have *heard* his word of peace. You have been forgiven of your sins. This forgiveness is won for you by Christ. And it is God’s desire that this peace be proclaimed to all the world. And as Jesus bid Thomas to touch his hands and his side, Christ bids *you* to eat his body and drink his blood, his body that bears the marks of the nails. His blood that was shed to mark the doorposts of your heart, so that death will passover you forever.

Peace with this world is not gained through forgiveness, but submission. Submission to the evil desires of the masses. Do not speak out against sin. Don’t talk about the need for forgiveness in Christ. That will give you peace with the world. But it won’t give you peace with God. Peace with God comes from Christ alone. His death for you. His rising that bears the marks that paid for your sins. That gives you peace. And it is that peace that God gives you every time you hear, “Your sins are forgiven.” When you eat Christ’s body and drink his blood in the bread and wine. When you believe in this peace, you truly receive it.

Peace with the world is short lived. But peace with God lasts to eternal life. The peace of God, which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.