

EASTER 2, A – April 19, 2020  
SCRIPTURES – Ps. 105; Acts 5:29-42; 1 Peter 1:3-9; John 20:19-31

*Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld." John 20*

You know the old saying, "The more things change, the more they remain the same." Well, it's amazing to me how often this applies to the stories in the Bible. Take today's Gospel. Jesus' disciples are in a room by themselves. The doors are locked because they are afraid. Boy, how this sounds like us right now: shut up in our homes and rooms, and separated from one another; and all because we are afraid of what's out there... afraid it will find us and harm us.

Jesus comes to us today! – the same Jesus who appeared in the midst of the disciples: the One who triumphed over sin and death by His resurrection and is now eternally living; the One who overcame the worst of what His enemies could throw at Him, and who can never again be threatened by or harmed by them; the One before whom everyone and everything in heaven and on earth must bow, including every disease and every evil of this world. The living Lord Jesus is among us! Be at peace!!

Be at peace. For, Jesus comes to bring you peace... although, not worldly peace. The fear that filled, and froze, His disciples after His death – fear of their enemies, that what they did to Jesus they might also do to them – that fear was taken away. They became bold witnesses to Jesus! But, the threats against them persisted... as we see in the reading from Acts 5. Not long after Jesus' resurrection and ascension into heaven the leaders of the Jewish people became enraged with His apostles and wanted to kill them, as they had killed Jesus. Opposition to our Savior's teachings remains to this day. It's not really too bad for us. The worst you might face is perhaps being berated, unfriended, and rejected. But, there are places in the world – especially in Muslim and Communist countries – where you could face arrest, fines, imprisonment, and even death for being a Christian. It's not easy to be a follower of Jesus!

Conflicts with one another also disturb our peace. How do you think things were between the disciples who saw Jesus on the day He rose and Thomas, who, because he didn't see Him, refused to believe that He was alive... refused to believe *them*? I'll bet there was a bit of tension between them. Harsh words were probably spoken. Thomas was calling them – and Jesus, frankly – liars and fools! Well, do we not get angry with and even mistreat one another at times? Like Thomas, we can be stubborn! Believing ourselves to be right, we, too, accuse others!

- One day last week, while on my way home from the bank, I remembered that one of the headlights on my car was out, and so I stopped at an auto parts store. "*I have a 2006 Impala,*" I told the clerk, so he looked it up in his computer and told me I needed an H11 bulb. Well, guess what? When I got home and took the headlight out, the new bulb wouldn't fit. I looked at the old bulb and saw on it: H8.

*“Rrrr, dumb clerk!”* I grumbled. *“Can’t get one simple thing right.”* Doesn’t it bug you when people screw up simple things? So, I returned the bulb and got an H8 bulb... and later realized I had replaced my car’s high-beam light (an H8, which didn’t need replacing) instead of the low-beam light (an H11). *“Rrrr... dummy!”*

We’re all dummies. We’re all sinners. We all have disagreements and get angry with one another – with co-workers... with friends... with fellow church-members... and with family members – and sometimes it’s because we believe we’re right.

Jesus is the only truly righteous one. And when He rose, He appeared among His fearful and guilt-ridden disciples. He knew their sins, as surely as He knew their fear and knew Thomas’ unbelief. Still, He came and said, ***“Peace be with you.”*** He had no harsh words of rebuke, not even for Thomas. He had borne the harsh rebuke that their sins deserved in His own flesh. He pointed to His wounds as the reminder of that. By His death and resurrection has overcome every sin of every one of us! He, with His Father, is at peace with us! We need not be afraid.

In fact, we can rejoice! Jesus gave to His disciples peace; His peace. He forgave their sins, and gave them peace with God. With that peace comes a new life and a new hope. Peter sums it up well for us (1 Pet. 1): ***“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, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”*** God has prepared a home for you with Him, an inheritance in heaven! He is watching over and guarding it... guarding you. Be at peace, then, even when your world is in turmoil. The Lord of heaven and earth is not only watching over you; He is holding you in His hand!

Can you be sure of this? Here is where you must trust God. Jesus is no longer walking among us and speaking His comfort to us. But, do not doubt that He is with you. You must now look to where the peace of His presence, with His forgiveness and love and help and protection, is found: in His words, which are given to us by His apostles.

***“Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you,”*** Jesus told them. Then, He breathed on them and said, ***“Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld.”*** This is an astounding promise... an astounding gift. Those simple, and sinful, men would be and would bring, with their words and actions, the presence of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, as Jesus was and brought the presence of God the Father and the Holy Spirit! It is with trust in that promise, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, that the apostle John wrote: ***“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 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.”*** (John 20:30-31)

Right now, pretty much all we have are these words. We're unable to meet together in God's house to encourage and uphold one another with our own words and prayers. We're unable to receive together the eternally living Jesus in the Sacrament of His body and blood. Thank God for the technology we have, which at least allows us to see and join in this worship, and see and hear one another in Bible studies! Still, it seems that we have little more than words... and this is difficult.

But, the words we have are the words of those who were blessed by Jesus with His forgiveness and the gift of His Holy Spirit! And so, the words we have are words that are filled with life:

- The life of God the Father: who by His voice, His words, brought forth all that is, and every living thing, at the beginning.
- The life of Jesus: the eternal Word who joined Himself to us in our flesh, that by His death and resurrection He might create us anew in Him.
- The life of the Holy Spirit, who breathes faith into us and raises us to eternal life with God through these words.

When these words of God were spoken over you and water was poured upon your head, God ***“caused [you] to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.”*** (1 Pet. 1) As you read and listen to these words, ***“God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” [shines] in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”*** (2 Cor. 4:6) By these simple words creation happens! And so, St. Paul writes: ***“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”*** (2 Cor. 5:17)

By His words – written in the pages of the Bible, and read by you; spoken by the mouths of His pastors, and by you to one another; remembered in the mind and believed upon and treasured in the heart – Jesus is with you, and is giving you His eternal peace. Peter therefore urges: ***“Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation.”*** (1 Pet. 2:2) Yearn for God's Word like a baby yearns for its mother's milk! For, as a mother's milk is just what her baby needs – produced by her, it is filled not only with nutrients but also with natural antibodies that protect her child from disease – God's Word is just what you need. Made pure by the Holy Spirit and filled with the nutrients of the living Christ and His forgiveness, God's Word will cause you to grow in Christ until you obtain ***“the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”*** (1 Pet. 3:9) To the praise of Jesus, our eternal peace! Amen.