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Trinity Lutheran Church
Decatur, Illinois
2nd Sunday Of Easter
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“Words And Wounds”

God’s PEACE is ALWAYS YOURS in Jesus.

Hear the Word of God from John 20,

“Thomas said, ‘Unless I see the nail marks in His hands, and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into His side. I will not believe it.’

A week later, when His disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them, though the doors were locked, Jesus came in and stood among them, and said, ‘Peace be with you!’ Then He said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here! See my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.’

Thomas said, ‘My Lord and my God.’ Then Jesus said, “Because you have seen, you have believed. Blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed!”

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST,

It was late afternoon of that first day of the week, when death was swallowed up in the victory of Jesus. Death was always considered the great swallower; but now the great swallower had been swallowed, when the full brunt of death hit Jesus in our place, and it was not able to keep Him dead. By the resurrection we laugh at death.

The disciples are huddled behind locked doors afraid. The Jewish leaders crucified Jesus, surely they'd be next. But death is conquered. Jesus is risen. They had heard about the resurrection from Mary, the women, and Peter, but they hadn't seen, heard, or touched Jesus. So they're still afraid. Dead men don't rise ordinarily. The news seemed too good to be true.

Suddenly Jesus appeared. No standing at the door and knocking. How did He get in? Do we really need to ask such questions? He's God for whom nothing is impossible. There He stands, right before them, as the One Who has conquered their death, and ours. The first words out of His mouth are "***Peace Be With You.***" This is the first gift of the resurrection. Everything has been set right between God and man. This peace is not some hollow, pie-in-the-sky wishful thinking, this is true peace with God. Sinners are reconciled to God because Jesus absorbed God's wrath for us. Jesus then checked out of His grave, validating that our sins were paid for, and the death they deserved was conquered. When Jesus rises, death loses.

With His words, He shows them His wounds. The visible proof, or the basis of our peace with God. The wounds mark Him as the crucified one. Without the wounds, they might have doubted that they had the right Jesus. Is it really Jesus, or perhaps His stunt double? Thomas said "***Unless I see the nailholes in His hands, and place my finger into the nailholes, and my hand into His side, I will not believe.***"

Jesus wounds are more than proof that He's actually risen, they are the source of our peace with God. Isaiah 53, "***By His wounds we are healed.***" Wounds denote sacrifice. The wounded Jesus shows forth He was redemption's price; once dead, but now standing alive before their eyes. The price of our freedom and forgiveness.

John 20, "***After He said, 'Peace be with you,' He showed them His hands and his side, and the disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.***" Seeing the once-dead sacrifice for their sins, standing in front of their faces alive, the disciples are bursting at the seams with joy!

Again Jesus says “***Peace be with you.***” Didn’t the first time work? Of course it did! But now He gives something more. “***As the Father has sent me, so I’m sending you. Then He breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’***” A little preview of Pentecost. This is their ordination. With His words and His Spirit, Jesus ordains them to speak in His stead and by His command. What He speaks and what He wants heard is the reason He died – forgiveness of sins. He wants forgiveness to be spoken. “***If you forgive anyone their sins they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone it is withheld.***” Luther once said, “***the church is to be the mouth-house of forgiveness.***” You may say, “But only God can forgive sins.” That’s right, but if He chooses to use the mouth of a pastor to declare and deliver the forgiveness of sins, that’s His prerogative. Do you believe that the absolution you hear from the pastor is God’s absolution? Well, you should. It is authorized by the Lord Himself. When the Lord breathed on them and said “***Peace be with you. Receive the Holy Spirit,***” the disciples inhale forgiveness first from Jesus, so they can exhale it out to the world. The same for us.

That’s what the Office of the Holy Ministry is all about. Forgiveness; or, if you will not be forgiven, then withholding forgiveness. No forcing. Sins forgiven and sins retained. We call it the “Office of the Keys” – the keys that lock heaven (the Law), or unlock heaven (the Gospel) by applying the forgiveness Jesus won at the cross. The words, “***I forgive you all your sins,***” spoken in the stead and by the command of the Lord Jesus Christ are the surest words there are on earth. They come by way of the cross and the empty tomb. They come with Jesus’ breath – His breathed out Spirit – in view of His wounds. They justify the sinner. “***These words are Spirit, and they are life.***” – the words of eternal life. Cherish them, believe them, cling to them. If you have nothing else but those words, you have all that Jesus died to win for you.

But notice, Thomas wasn’t there that Sunday. See what happens when you miss church? You miss Jesus’ words, wounds, breath, and Spirit. You miss out on His gifts. The other disciples told him what happened. But Thomas refuses to believe. In fact, he says, “***Unless I touch His hands and side, there’s no way I’ll ever believe it.***” That’s not simply doubt, that’s unbelief.

So what's our sin? Our sin is that we're slow of heart to believe in Christ's death and resurrection too. How can I know for sure that it happened? I wasn't there. Jesus' words and wounds that He gives us in the Gospel and in His Supper aren't good enough. SEEING is believing. *"If I can't see it, hear it, smell it, taste it and touch it; I won't believe it."* There's a little Thomas in each of us – demanding proof, rather than taking God at His Word. It's too good to be true, so we put limitations on Christ. The Old Adam has to be put to death by returning to our Baptism where it was put to death. God's promises in Baptism don't have an expiration date. In Baptism the Old Adam died and I was raised to life with the risen Christ, so we recall our Baptism and give the Old Adam a nice funeral, put it in its place, and remind it that it is dead in the death of Jesus, and I'm alive.

We also sin like the other 10 disciples. They were hiding for fear of men, even having heard that death had been swallowed up by Jesus' resurrection. Nothing could harm them now, and yet they were afraid of men. Our sins keep us locked up in fear. We're afraid to confess Jesus to the world. We're afraid to turn from our sins in repentance. We try to cover up our sins like Adam and Eve who hid from God's judgment behind bushes and fig leaves. We try to throw the deadbolt to the door of our lives to shut God out, when all He wants is to tell us that He's crucified and risen for our forgiveness. Paroled prisoners often return to prison, because they believe it's safer.

Can the Good News really be that good? That not only did Jesus die for our sins and rise for our justification – but can it be sooo good that we actually get to hear Jesus' forgiveness, delivered to our ears like a package delivered to our front door, through the mouth of a Pastor? Absolutely! Luther said you should, *"drag the pastor by the ear to hear your confession and speak Christ's forgiveness to you."* Why? *"Because He's come to love you and not to condemn, and He offers a pardon of peace; if you'll come to His table, you will receive the greatest forgiveness, the greatest release."*

Fortunately for Thomas he went to church the next week with the disciples in that upper room. Jesus pops in again without so much as a knock on the door. Again He says, “***Peace be with you,***’ and again He shows them His wounds – the nails and spear marks. Then He condescends to Thomas’ need and says, “***Go ahead, Thomas, put your finger here, see my hands. Stick your hand into my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.***” Thomas believes and confesses, “***My Lord and my God!***” Gift received!

While you and I haven’t seen Jesus, we can hear Him every week through His Word, and we can see, hear, smell, taste and touch the same Risen body Thomas touched, in the Lord’s Supper, and hear Jesus say, “***Peace be with you. Be not unbelieving, but believe. This is my body broken for you. This is my blood shed for you,***” even if our brains can’t comprehend it. Thomas’ brain couldn’t figure out how one who was dead could be alive again; but when he faced the reality of the Risen Jesus, He simply confessed what he couldn’t understand, “***My Lord and my God!***” I don’t know how you pulled it off, but now I know that you are risen from the dead. And those disciples are our eye sockets. I John 1, “***Him whom we have heard, whom we have seen with our eyes, whom our hands have touched; Him we proclaim to you.***” He let those eyewitnesses see and touch His wounds for our benefit. Luke 24, “***Touch Me and see, a ghose does not have flesh and bones as you see I have. Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me to win forgiveness, so now I am sending you to proclaim it,*** with the full weight and authority of the empty tomb.

Today, Jesus comes to us in this upper room, on the same day that He rose, and on the same day that He appeared to Thomas. Our doors aren’t locked, because we don’t fear the losing of our lives. Although the doors aren’t locked, the pews also aren’t filled, because we fail to download the significance of the resurrection: ***Because I live you will live also.*** On the same day He rose and appeared to Thomas, He now comes to us in His Word, with the same body Thomas touched, in His Supper, with the same good news: ***Peace be with you. Your sins are forgiven.***

Jesus said “***Peace be with you***”, then He showed them His wounds (*the source of our peace with God*).....Then “***He breathed on them and said ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’***” (*so that we can believe that His peace and His wounds were for us*). Then the Holy Spirit works faith, ***Thomas said, ‘My Lord and my God’***. Then He sends His disciples and us to exhale forgiveness to a world that refuses to believe its own forgiveness. It’s really quite sad. And the only thing standing between them and hell is Jesus’ words and us: “***whosoever sins you forgive they are forgiven.***”

Dr. Louis Brighton, professor emeritus at our St. Louis seminary once said, ‘*the sin of refusing to confess Christ crucified and risen for our forgiveness is a sin, that like any other sin deserves death.*’ Jesus is alive, which means He made it back out of hell and the grave, which means death is conquered, which means sins are paid for, which means the cross worked, which means Jesus meant it when He said, “***It is finished!***”, which means His words are the truth; which means we’re all forgiven in Christ. Are you sure that you want to keep that to yourself? Are you sure that you don’t want your loved ones and friends to know it?

In closing, in case you missed it, there’s actually one more gift in our text, a bonus blessing. Jesus said, “***Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed.***’ In other words, Jesus has you and me in mind. We can’t see Jesus face to face, YET; but we can hear His words. We can’t touch His glorified wounds YET; but you can eat and drink of His wounded and risen body and blood in the Lord’s supper. We don’t see YET; but we will soon. For now He simply bids us to take Him at His words and wounds. Lord, You said to me, “***Peace be with you and you rose again to prove it; and I’m taking you at your word that I am reconciled and at peace with God, because of your wounds Jesus. Amen.***”

And now may the peace of God, which passes all human understanding keep our hearts and minds in the one true faith unto life everlasting. Amen.