

"Jesus Is Alive and With Us"

John 20:19-31

Second S. of Easter

Messiah, Boerne

April 16, 2023

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Read text: John 20:19-31

Dear Friends in Christ:

Last week Christians gathered together in churches throughout the world to celebrate the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that celebration continues today: Alleluia! Christ is risen! [He is risen indeed!] Alleluia! But this week fewer people will be in church. In fact, this Sunday is known throughout the Church as "low Sunday" due to its consistently low attendance rate year after year. The reasons *why* people are not in church today are many—too numerous to mention—but the reason *for* people to be here is singular: As we are reminded in our Gospel text today, Jesus is *alive*, and He is *with us*!

Now, while you and I gather together today to worship and praise our living Lord, our text says that

ten of the eleven disciples gathered together for a far different reason. Rather than celebrating our Lord's resurrection, they gathered together in fear of possibly losing their lives. Our text says, "On the evening of [Easter Sunday] . . . the doors being locked where the disciples were *for fear of the Jews*. . ." (v. 19). Matthew writes in his Gospel that some of the guards posted at Jesus' tomb had gone to the Jewish elders to report His resurrection and the empty tomb, and that they had been paid a large amount of money to spread the story that the disciples had come to the tomb at night and stolen his body while they were asleep (28:11-15). While that story may sound ridiculous to us, the sinful behavior of bribery for false testimony is far too common among fallen human beings. Furthermore, the disciples were already afraid of the Jews, having seen how they had condemned and crucified their Master. They feared the worst and remained hidden inside the house behind the inner and outer locked doors.

Despite such physical hindrances and restraints, Jesus miraculously came and stood among the disciples with Good News to calm their fears. "Shalom," Jesus announced to them, that is, "Peace be with you" (v. 19). "Shalom" is the traditional Hebrew greeting, but Jesus' resurrection gives it a new and grander meaning because, from now on, our living Lord comes with new life and peace, that is, the promise of perfect health and wholeness, *for all*. Jesus shows the disciples His hands and side which still bear the marks of his crucifixion so that they may believe He is alive again, and then He commissions them to tell others the Good News of the forgiveness of sins, new life, and peace won for them by His death on the cross and resurrection from the dead.

Jesus says to the disciples, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld" (vv. 23). With these words, Jesus gives to His Church the Office of the Keys, that is, the

authority to proclaim the Good News of the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ to all people to forgive the sins of repentant sinners. Some people who hear about Jesus will believe the Good News by the power of the Holy Spirit and be forgiven, while others will not believe or be forgiven because they reject the Holy Spirit and the Good News Jesus' disciples proclaim (Mt 23:37). Why some will believe and others will not is not under our power or control. We are simply called to tell others the Good News about Jesus, and to trust that God will work His good and gracious will when and where He pleases among the people groups of the earth.

By God's mercy, we are among those to whom Jesus' message of forgiveness, life, and peace has come, and by His grace, we have received power by the Holy Spirit to believe and to share this Good News with others.

You see, we live because Jesus lives (Jn 10:10b). We have peace because Jesus made peace with God through the forgiveness of sins He won for us on the cross (2 Cor. 5:18-19). We are sent to be witnesses because

Jesus, the Son of God, to whom all authority in heaven and earth has been given, sends us (v. 21; Mt. 28:18-20). What a challenge we have been given by God—to tell others the Good News about Jesus! What power we have been given by the Holy Spirit—authority to reach out boldly into our community to connect people to Christ!

But we also have fears, don't we? And sometimes our faith fails us when we ought to believe. In that sense, we are all like Thomas, who was not with the other ten disciples on Easter evening when Jesus first appeared to them. The other disciples told him about having seen the Lord, and Thomas also lived by the philosophy: "Seeing is believing." Unless he personally saw Jesus' scars and touched his wounds, he would not believe that He was risen from the dead (v. 25). You see, it's not that Thomas didn't believe *anything*. He simply "misbelieved," that is, he believed the wrong thing. He believed Jesus was dead. He had seen Jesus die on the cross and had forgotten

about His promises, His words spoken to the disciples during their journey to Jerusalem about His suffering, death, and resurrection on the third day. Thomas needed his faith renewed.

So, our text says, "eight days later," that is, the following Sunday, Thomas was with the disciples inside the house. "Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them [as before] and said, 'Peace be with you'" (v. 26). Jesus came to the eleven to renew their faith in the risen Lord, not to scold Thomas for doubting the other disciples' testimony but to help him in his misbelief. So, with the loving care of a good shepherd gently guiding His wayward sheep back home, Jesus says to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand and place it in my side. Do not misbelieve but believe" (v. 27). Jesus doesn't want any to be lost, but all to be saved by believing in him (v. 31). So, Jesus comes to Thomas, and helps him with his mistaken faith to believe correctly.

You see, a lot of people in the world think like

Thomas, that seeing is believing, but Jesus encourages the philosophy: "Believing is seeing." In fact, that's how the writer to the Hebrews defines believing, that is, faith: "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (11:1). So, although we can't see Jesus, we believe He is with us according to His promises, like the eleven disciples that evening so long ago. As we gather together for worship, we call on Jesus' name, and as He promises, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them" (Mt. 18:20). He promises to be with us and to bless us through His Word, to live within us by His Holy Spirit given to us in Holy Baptism, and to dwell within us by His body and blood, distributed and received in Holy Communion. Although we can't see Jesus with our eyes, we believe the promises we hear with our ears in His Word, and we receive His promised blessing: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (v. 29).

Dear Friends in Christ, Thomas believed the disciples' testimony about the risen Lord because he saw Jesus with his own eyes. We know that he believed correctly by his bold confession of faith: "My Lord and My God" (v. 28). May our faith likewise be renewed by regularly gathering together in God's house, where Christ comes to us in His Word and Sacraments. Then let us walk in the confidence of our faith by helping others and sharing with them the Good News of our Lord's resurrection because Jesus is *alive* and *with us*.
Alleluia! Christ is risen! (He is risen indeed!)
Alleluia! Amen.