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Easter 2

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Exactly What You Need”
Text: John 20:19-31; 1 John 1:1-2:2

Alleluia! Christ is risen! [**He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**] Alleluia!

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Jesus knew exactly what they needed. Those disciples who were consumed by guilt, confused, and afraid. They should have done more. What did the future now hold for them? Would they be stoned or crucified? Locked doors couldn't keep out determined soldiers or second thoughts. Just a couple of nights ago they had celebrated the Passover and remembered all those great acts of God in delivering Israel from Egyptian bondage. Where were those great acts now? Maybe they felt like Israel trapped between the Red Sea and the pursuing Egyptian army . . . except the sea of fear and shame, guilt and confusion was sweeping over *them*! And they didn't know what to do.

But **Jesus knew exactly what they needed.** First is forgiveness for their guilt and shame. *Peace be with you.* He didn't scold them. He didn't rebuke them. He peaced them. Forgiveness for troubled hearts. Calm for raging and accusing minds. What they had seen Him do for so many others, He now did for them. And at His speaking it was done. There was peace in that room. Peace between master and disciple. Peace between God and man. Peace that surpasses understanding. The kind of peace that can only come from God Himself, and at His Word.

But they needed more than that. More than peace for their guilt and shame. They needed assurance for minds that were confused and running amok, dreaming up all kinds of scenarios and what-ifs and usually dwelling on the worst and magnifying their fears. So just like that night on the Sea of Galilee, when they saw Jesus walking on the water - which is impossible, right? Like that night, they probably thought they saw a ghost. The ghost of dead Jesus. Because here, Jesus, locked doors - again, it's impossible, right? So . . .

So Jesus *shows them His hands and His side.* John would say later in his first epistle, that we heard earlier, that they not only saw Jesus alive with their own eyes, but also *touched Him with their hands.* Possibly, probably, right here, right now, in that room. Unsure and shaking hands probing that body they had seen breathe its last and hanging dead on the cross. It was again no ghost. And this time, it wasn't the winds and waves that He quieted and stilled, it was the hearts and minds of His friends. Though human

hearts and minds are not so easy to still as winds and waves, are they? But He did, and they were. ***The disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.*** Joy now began to fill their hearts and minds.

But still more they needed, Jesus knew. They needed instruction, purpose. Not just for some distant future, but for tomorrow! For when they would leave that room. They couldn't stay there forever. They needed to know that what had just happened, all the events of that past week, was not a monumental catastrophe that messed up and derailed everything and now necessitated Plan B! But that when Jesus had told them one day some three years before, to *follow Him and He would make them fishers of men* (Mark 1:17) - that was still the plan. And it was. ***As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you,*** He says. The peace they had just received is the peace they would now give. Peace and joy for troubled hearts and minds. Forgiveness to still the storms of guilt, accusation, and fear. And the Spirit of God, the Helper Jesus had promised them, with them, helping them.

Jesus knew exactly what they needed. Thomas, too. Eight days later, when the disciples were again assembled and recreated the scene for Thomas - same room, same locks, but not the same disciples - Jesus doesn't need to be told what Thomas said or what Thomas needed. He knew. And with the same gentleness and love that He showed the others, He peaces, forgives, and reassures Thomas. Thomas, who probably wasn't worse or more disbelieving than the others. He just said the quiet part out loud. So Jesus does for Him what He did for the others. No disciple left behind.

But it would not always be so. This was not the paradigm for how things would now be. That room with locked doors would not now be a shrine or a chapel for disbelievers or doubters to come and see Jesus every week. Rather, Jesus says, ***blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*** That was not so much a rebuke of Thomas as it was direction for the future. There would be a weekly gathering of disciples, like this one, but the blessing would not come by sight, but by faith. Faith which believes the Word, and the Word which gives the gifts of God. For *still* at His speaking it is done. His Word giving peace. His Word forgiving. His Word calming troubled hearts and stilling raging minds. His Word the disciples were now sent to speak. As they had done for Thomas, now they would do for all.

So John writes them down, all these words. *For you. These [things] 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.* That you be among the blessed - *those who have not seen and yet have believed.*

For Jesus knows exactly what you need, as well. You who are not in a room with locked doors for fear of the Jews, but you whose mouths may be locked shut for fear of the world. You who are also filled with guilt and shame over what you have done and what you have left undone. You confessed that again this morning. How have *you*

denied? How have *you* betrayed? How have *you* rebelled? How have *you* been sleeping when you should have been praying, running instead of remaining steadfast? And you whose hearts and minds are confused and troubled because you've been listening to the world more than listening to God? Because the winds and waves and storms and threats of the world seem so big and powerful, and the Word of God so small and weak. And we, too, maybe begin to doubt . . . Did God really say? Is it really true? What does the future hold? Because it doesn't look good! Churches shrinking, unbelief rising, persecution increasing, ungodliness embraced, the truth disregarded, the sacred trampled, power exalted, evil called good and good called evil, the altars of selfishness and greed, happiness and self-fulfillment, now where so many bow and worship . . . It all makes locked doors sound pretty good!

But Jesus wouldn't let His disciples stay behind those locked doors, and they're not an option for us either. What *sounds* good may not *be* good. **But Jesus knows exactly what you need.** And it's exactly what the disciples needed. And it's not to see Him but to hear Him. For ***blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*** And how you believe without seeing is by hearing. Hearing the Word of God. The Word of God that is not just words in the air, but words spoken that do what they say. The Word through which the Spirit of God works and is given to you.

Which is why this weekly gathering is so important! That the Word be spoken to you, and you have what it says. Forgiveness for guilty hearts. Peace for troubled minds. Calm for bestormed souls. Assurance for shaky and timid consciences. Truth in the midst of falsehood. And purpose. That as bad as you may have messed up your life, and gone astray, and rebelled, and just generally not been the person you should have been . . . kind of like Peter, James, John, Philip, Andrew, Matthew, Thomas, Bartholomew, James, Thaddeus, and Simon! . . . all is not lost. Those eleven would *still* be fishers of men, and you are *still* called to be His children and fulfill the vocations He has given you. God doesn't want you to sin! That's not good! But as John wrote, ***My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation - that is, the sacrifice, the atonement - for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.***

The sins of the whole world! Do you have any sins, small or great, not included there? Then Jesus died for them. And when you hear each week, here, in this weekly gathering, the words of Jesus, *I forgive you all your sins*, they are. You can be sure. Forgiveness for your guilty heart, peace for your troubled mind, and calm for your bestormed soul. And the assurance that the promises of your baptism are still good and you are still His child. Jesus did not reject those eleven for their sin and He does not reject you.

And as He sent them, so He sends you. As much as they wanted to stay in that room with Jesus, safe from the threats and troubles of life, they could not stay. For the whole world was waiting for the news of Jesus' resurrection and the forgiveness, peace, and life He

rose to give. They would be fishers of men. They would go and speak and give. And they would not go alone. They had been given the Spirit, the Helper, who would go with them.

The Spirit, the Helper, you also have been given. To go out to the people you have been given and to the places you have been sent. To be father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, or worker; to be neighbor, friend, classmate, or workmate; to pray, encourage, help, speak, and live the truth of God's Word. In faith. Faith that you are blessed, and faith that what you do will bless others. Faith, for the blessing in the Lord's, not yours. And faith that while you may not see or know how you and your presence has blessed others, that doesn't mean it hasn't. For still, ***blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed***. That God is working, through you, for others.

Even those who may be like Thomas, who may rebuff your words with doubt and your faith with mocking. Even those who may be like the Jews, who may answer your faith with persecution and violence. Even those who think you may just be mad and out of your mind. And you will meet such people, if you haven't already, just like those eleven did. That's okay. ***Peace be with you***. Jesus is risen. And He is working. One plants, another waters, and another harvests (1 Corinthians 3:6-9). Maybe more than you know.

So as Jesus invited Thomas to ***put out his hand, and place it in [His Body and Blood] side***, so now He bids you open your mouths and He will place His Body and Blood into you. That you, too, believe. That you, too, be forgiven. That you, too, confess. That you, too, arise and go from this place filled with confidence and faith, and into a world full of people still waiting to hear of Jesus' resurrection, forgiveness, peace, and life. That set free by Jesus, what has been given to you, you now give to others.

For it is true! Christ is risen! **[He is risen indeed! Alleluia!]** Alleluia!
Risen with peace and life for you.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.