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Easter 2

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“Peace Be With You”

Text: John 20:19-31; Revelation 1:4-18

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.

In School Chapel on Thursday morning, I told the kids that - *being completely honest* - that if I was Thomas, and my friends came up to me three days after I had just seen my friend and the man I had been a disciple of for the past three years die on a cross and then be laid in a tomb, and they came and told me He was alive, **I wouldn't have believed it either!** I probably would have said the same things Thomas said. *Yeah, right! Alive? Bring Him to me, let me see Him - then I'll believe.* Because that kind of thing just doesn't happen.

Except Jesus had said it would.

Jesus had told these disciples a number of times that He would be crucified and then be raised. He told them just before He was arrested that He was going away for a little while, and then after a little while would come back. So this shouldn't have been a complete surprise to them. AND, they had seen Jesus raise three people from death before this - the young daughter of a man named Jairus, the son of a widow from the city of Nain, and his friend Lazarus.

But I get it. It's one thing when it happens to others. It's one thing to raise others from death. **But the dead don't raise themselves.** When YOU die . . . I mean, you're dead! What can you do then? So alive now? Yeah, it's hard to believe. This isn't normal. This just doesn't happen in our world. There is life, and there is death. And when you die, you die. *That's* normal.

Except death *isn't* normal. This isn't how it was supposed to be. When God created the world, there wasn't life and death - there was only life! Good life. Abundant life. Perfect life. It's only when Adam and Eve sinned and plunged themselves and the world into sin that death came into the world. So this is exactly what Jesus had come to fix. He came to be *the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world* (John 1:29). So if death came into the world because of sin, if you take away sin, you take care of

death. **And that's exactly what happened on Easter.**

That's why when Jesus came to His disciples that first Easter night - their **bodies** locked in that room for fear of the Jews, and their **hearts and consciences** locked up in guilt and shame - the first thing He did was say, ***Peace be with you.*** Which wasn't just a greeting, like saying hello. They were words which gave what they said. Peace. *Shalom.* Which means, *everything is alright.* In the midst of this time when everything was not alright, *everything is alright.* Don't be ashamed, don't be consumed with guilt. I'm here *for you.* With forgiveness and life. And **when He had said this**, John tells us . . . *only after that* did Jesus show them His hands and His side. Then He showed them His resurrection. Forgiveness first. Then the resurrection.

And then Jesus sends them to do . . . *what? Forgive.* Isn't it interesting that He doesn't tell them to go tell everyone that He is risen and alive? They will. But first and foremost, He sends them to forgive. Because this is what we all need! First and foremost. *Forgiveness.*

So I wonder . . . *maybe that's what they forgot to do?* When Jesus came to the disciples He forgave them and then showed them His hands and side. But when the disciples went to tell their friend, Thomas, we don't read of peace, shalom, and forgiveness. It seems like they forgot that. They went right to: *He's alive! He's alive!* And I wonder if that's why Thomas said what he said. If his sins and guilt and shame were getting in the way. Because what he really needed is what the others needed: **forgiveness.**

So when Jesus came to them again, eight days later, on the next Sunday, He did it right. **The same as He did the first time.** *First*, peace be with you. First, shalom and forgiveness. *Then*, the resurrection. Look Thomas. ***Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.***

You see, the order is important. For if Jesus didn't forgive us, how would we know His rising from the dead was good news? And, in fact, I assert, not only would we not know, with our sin and shame and guilty consciences, *we would assume it's not!* Like . . .

. . . when the **Pastor** wants to come over to your house and talk to you. Uh oh! Bad news! What have I done? Or what does he want me to do?

. . . or when the **boss** comes up to you and says, we need to talk. Uh oh! Bad news! He knows I screwed up! He knows I've been taking too long for lunch. My project is behind schedule.

... or when the **doctor** come into the room after a test and says, Well ... Uh oh! Bad news! I'm going to die!

So, *Jesus is back?* Oh man, He must be so disappointed with us. He's going to scold us or fire us as disciples. Three years and this is what He got? Peter, you didn't sell your boat, did you? I think we're going to need that again ...

But what if ...

... your **boss first** tells you your doing such a good job. We need to get you a bigger office or cubicle, or one with a window. Come, let's talk!

... or if your **doctor first** says, Everything looks good! Here's what we found out ...

... of if the **Pastor first** says how glad he is that you're here and a member of the church, and he just wants to come over to find out how we can better help you and serve you.

That would be a little different, wouldn't it?

So Jesus **first** says, **Peace be with you**. *Shalom*. Well-being. Everything is good. I'm not here to scold or punish, to reject or fire you. I'm here to forgive and raise YOU to life again, too! Just as I am. I can do that. For look, I'm risen from the dead. I took care of that for you, your sin and death. Look at you, locked in this room like it's a tomb! Go! You're free! I took care of everything. This is good news.

And they did. They left that room with that great burden of guilt off their shoulders, with that great millstone of shame removed from their necks. And the next week, Thomas did, too.

And that's why Jesus then said, **Have you believed because you have seen me?** That is, do you think that's what happened here, Thomas? No. Blessed comes from My Word. Blessed comes with forgiveness and peace. The reality is, **Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed**. And so blessed were the ten in that locked room, *who heard*, and then Thomas, *who heard*, and now you and me, *who hear*. You and me who **hear** Jesus' Word of forgiveness and peace every time we gather here.

(1.) **First and foremost, we hear that we are forgiven**. That because *Almighty God in His mercy has given His Son to die for us, for His sake He forgives us all our sins*. And just as He sent those disciples out from that locked room to forgive, so He has put a

called and ordained servant here to speak this word of forgiveness. *I forgive you all your sins.* The Pastor's voice, Jesus' words and forgiveness. And you have peace. Shalom.

(2.) **Then in peace, we pray for peace.** For others. *In peace, let us pray to the Lord. . . For the peace from above . . . for the peace of the whole world . . .* We're not just praying that we would all get along. We're praying for forgiveness and new life for all people. Peace with God. That kind of peace. *Shalom.*

(3.) **Then we sing of the one** *whose blood set us free* - free from being locked up in sin and guilt and shame - *set us free to be people of God.*

(4.) **Then we hear** again *how* Jesus did that, in His Word and in the sermon. And we repeat that - we confess it, we same the same thing - in the words of the Creed.

(5.) **And then our risen Lord comes to us** in this room His Body and Blood. Thomas and the others may have gotten to touch His hands and side, but we get to do one better! We get to eat His Body and drink His Blood. And after we do, you depart from the altar with these words: *Depart in peace.* In Shalom.

(6.) **Then** we pray in thanksgiving that *our heavenly Father has given us pardon and peace in this Sacrament.* And finally in the Benediction, we hear it *again*, in the very last words of the service: *The Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace.*

From first to last, we hear word after word after word of peace. Peace for troubled consciences. Forgiveness for our sin. Healing of our guilt and shame. And we are blessed, *though we have not seen.*

But one day we will. When Jesus comes back again, for us, on the Last Day, in glory. John gave us a glimpse of that in the reading we heard from Revelation. And do you remember how Jesus was described there? ***A long robe with a golden sash. The hairs of his head were white like wool, as white as snow. Even whiter than mine! His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet like burnished bronze, and his voice like the roar of many water. From his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.*** Yikes! Right? No wonder when John saw him, he ***fell at his feet as though dead.***

But then that voice again! ***Fear not.*** This is the one who gives **peace.** *Shalom.* Forgiveness. Life. Hope. This is the Jesus of the cross, risen from the dead, glorified. And if we didn't know better, we *should* be afraid! He's terrifying! But we do know better. For He has told us, over and over and over again, word after word after word **of peace.** He is not against us, but for us. He is coming to take us home, to a kingdom

which has no cross, no death, no end.

And that's our joy this Easter season, and even beyond that. The joy of forgiveness, peace, and new life in our risen Saviour. Joy that we now get to share. For sin and guilt and shame is not just epidemic, its a pandemic! (Sorry to bring back bad memories with that word!) But it's true! But we have the cure, the solution, in Jesus. ***Peace be with you.*** Whatever you've done, whoever you are, Jesus is for you.

That's the message Jesus sent His disciples out into the world with, and now the message He has sent the church out into the world with, and the message WE go out into the world with, and to our families with, and to our friends with, and even to our enemies with, when we walk out those doors today. That in this messed up world, this sinful world, this gone mad world, this everything is not okay world, there is **one place** everything is okay again. In Jesus. In Him we have peace. In Him we have life.

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

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.