

Quasimodo Geniti, The Second Sunday of Easter, A ✕ D 2009

John 20:19-31 On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." ²⁰ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." ²² And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld." ²⁴ Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe." ²⁶ Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁷ Then he said to 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." ²⁸ Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." ³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ 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.

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

1 Their fear persists. It's the same fear that gripped them Thursday night in the Garden when the soldiers came to arrest their Lord. It's the fear that caused them all to flee. It's the same fear that gripped Peter in the courtyard by the fire, when, even though he swore he wouldn't, he denied his Lord three times, just to avoid the same torture and suffering Jesus was undergoing. It's the same fear that gripped them all during that Sabbath, knowing their Lord was in the tomb. It's the same fear that gripped the women who went early to the tomb, that gripped Mary Magdalene as she pleaded with the "Gardener" to return the Body, that stopped John at the mouth of the tomb while Peter went in. Their fear persists. Despite the reports from the women about the Lord being raised from the dead, the disciples were fraught with fear as they met in the same upper room where the Lord instituted His Supper, being careful to lock the door, for fear of the Jews.

2 Once was ridiculous enough, but then, having seen the Resurrected Jesus, having had Him speak peace to them, a week later, the disciples are gathered in the locked room again, afraid. Of what are they so afraid? The Jewish leaders who stopped at nothing to eliminate

Jesus and stop the belief that He was the Messiah, would they not also stop at nothing to silence His disciples? They were likely afraid of persecution, of torture, and of death. And yet, how silly their fears seemed knowing that their Lord had left the tomb behind Him, conquered sin and death for them, risen and appeared to them, spoken peace to them.

3 Christ is risen, yet the fear persists. In fact, fear is quite trendy. It's fear that keeps 24-hour news channels on, fear of terrorist attacks and pirate arrests, fear of recession and deflation, fear of computer viruses and rhinoviruses, fear of bankers and bailouts. And those are only your irrational fears. What about your real, rational fears? What about your fear that your husband will lose his job and be unable to find employment? What about your fear that the bank will foreclose on your house after just a couple missed mortgage payments? Your fear that your mother's cancer will get worse? Your fear that other kids will stop liking you if they discover the real you? Your fear that the diagnosis will be bad, that the bills will be too high, that the wait will be too long, that the pain will be too great?

4 The disciples' fear is unfounded. Things did not go awry when Jesus was crucified. This was not an unfortunate turn of events. It wasn't the Jews who were to blame for the death of their Lord. It wasn't even themselves or their sins to blame for the death of their Lord. The Lord was to blame. It was His plan from the beginning. It was the Father's will to send the Son to be the sacrifice for sinners. His death was because of His great love for His creation, for His disciples, for you. He bore all their sins and died for them. They have nothing to fear. Nor do you.

5 But Jesus didn't exhort His disciples to leave their fear. He comes to them. Not once, but twice even. The Resurrected Jesus, the Jesus who died for the sins of the world, who through His death destroyed death and who by rising to life had guaranteed eternal life to all who trust in Him for forgiveness, came to His disciples in the midst of their fear. While they were holed up in a locked room for fear of persecution, fear of death, fear of embarrassment, fear of whoknowswhat, Jesus appeared to them. To these fearing disciples, He has only a word

of comfort: Peace. The warfare is over, the enmity between Creator and creation is ended, the strife between sinful humanity and a holy God is done. Peace. The proof is in the scars, so He showed them His hands and His side. "I have borne your punishment; the chastisement that brings you peace was upon me; by my stripes you are healed." And again: Peace.

6 Not even Thomas the doubter, the incredulous, the stubborn unbeliever receives a tongue-lashing. On the 8th day after His Resurrection, Jesus appeared again to His disciples, again in a locked room. This time "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe" Thomas was there. Again: Peace to you. "Stick your finger here, Thomas; shove your hand here. Do not be an unbeliever but a believer." In humble adoration, Thomas confesses, "My Lord and my God."

7 Jesus didn't deliver them from the things that cause fear, but from fear itself. That's what they needed, after all. More than deliverance from the Jews, or the Romans, or the angry crowds, or the unbelievers, or the skeptics, the disciples needed the peace that comes from the death and resurrection of Jesus, the peace that comes from sins forgiven. Their Lord died for them. He rose victorious over death and promises the same resurrection to them. If not even death can do them harm, what do they have to fear? So ten of these eleven men would go on to face what had perhaps been their greatest fear: being tortured and executed for confessing that Jesus, the Crucified and Risen One, is Lord.

8 So to you, in the midst of your fears, your Lord comes. He doesn't come in some spiritual, imperceptible way. He comes through these men, to whom He said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld." You need peace. You need relief from fear. You need forgiveness. So those men whom Jesus sent placed their hands on others, putting them into the Office of Christ, giving them the Lord's charge to forgive or retain sins. Your Lord knows you need to hear His words to dispel your fears: I forgive you.

9 The world will rage. The things you fear will come to pass. Or they won't. Jesus doesn't promise to deliver you from these momentary afflictions. He promises to deliver you from sin and death. And from fear. Your Lord—the Crucified and Risen One—has destroyed death. Peace to you. Nothing that happens to you can change the fact that Jesus lived, died, and rose for you. Peace to you. Nothing that happens around you make the Lord withdraw His offer of forgiveness or call His ministers back to cease to deliver His forgiveness. Peace to you. Nothing that happens will ever change your Lord's love for you. The proof is in His scars. Peace to you.

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

Soli Deo Gloria
Pastor Jeff Hemmer
Hope, Jerseyville