

Quasimodo Geniti, 2006
Text: John 20:19-31
Trinity Lutheran, Worden, IL & Zion Lutheran, Carpenter, IL
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✠Grace, Mercy, and Peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ ✠

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

It was the evening of that first Easter day and still the doors were locked. The disciples, scattered since Good Friday, were now gathered together again – huddled together with the deadbolt thrown for fear of the Jews. It is Easter evening and still they are afraid, for still they do not believe. The women have come and told them the report of the angels, that Jesus is alive, up from the dead as he had so many times prophesied that he would be. Peter and John have already run to the tomb and found it empty with grave clothes neatly folded. All this has transpired already and still their hearts are hard – still they do not receive the Word of the Lord and believe. And so still they are afraid of men and not of God.

And then behold, Jesus is there with them. And how does he come to his wayward, fearful disciples? Does he chastise them for their unbelief? Does he berate them for their cowardice on Good Friday? Does he take revenge on them and then go look for other, better disciples? No. The Lord comes in mercy and with a blessing: 'Peace be with you.' And then he shows them His hands and side. Jesus does this to show his disciples that it is really him – the Crucified one. He shows them the hands pierced for their transgressions, and the side from which flowed water and blood. And thus is the

Peace of the Lord with them. Even for unbelieving Thomas a week later there is the gentlest rebuke in the midst of forgiveness and grace: Here Thomas, touch my side, put your finger here: see how I love you, see how I have poured out my life for you only to take it up again.

So Christian, do not be afraid. Peace be with you. Though you have been as slow of heart to believe as these disciples, though you have often been more afraid of men than of God and thus have sinned against the Lord: still, Peace be with you. For surely you too have locked your doors because of fear. Surely you have known the deep depression and sorrow of these disciples, locked away in a room with only their dread to keep them company. In the frailty of your sin-weak flesh you have feared what men could do to you, what bill collectors could take from you, what death and disease could steal from you.

Repent of these follies and learn that the only thing to fear is God himself – and rejoice to know that he is for you, that he loves you, that he poured out his life for you on the cross. These other fears are as senseless as the fear the disciples had for the Jews. What could men do to the disciples now that Christ was up from the dead? At most men could kill them – but as another apostle would learn to say, “For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.” The curtain is closed on fear because the curtain of the temple was torn from top to bottom when Jesus died. Our long held fears are now empty, for the tomb on third day was empty.

But what is more, Jesus now takes these frail men, these weak sinners, and sends

them out as apostles. This is the way of the Lord. He chooses the weak to humble the strong. He chooses the foolish to spite the wise. For what could be more foolish God the Father sending God the Son to die at the hands of men on a cross? What could be more humbling, what could force us to walk more by faith rather than sight, than the Sacramental way in which the Lord sends us salvation?

For behold, in this upper room where Jesus had washed their feet and given them his Body and Blood in the Supper, Jesus now shows them his side as a sign of what their lives would be from now on. For from that side of Jesus, as the Apostle John tells us, flowed water and blood. Now the apostles are sent out to baptize with water and the Spirit and to feed the people of God with the body and blood of the risen Christ. They are to preach the beauty of the scars of the Crucified one, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. And, miracle of miracles, they are now ordered even to forgive and retain sins on earth in the stead and by the command of the risen Christ.

And thus is the Church of Christ always nurtured with the gifts of Christ through the Office of Christ. For Christ is all in all in his Church, in his gifts, and in his office. The apostles did not stand on their own authority. Peter could not work up in himself the spiritual strength to give new spiritual birth to sinners. But Jesus sends Peter to baptize – for the power comes from Christ, Peter just follows orders, the holy orders, the ordination which he receives here. John has no personal power which would allow him to give Christ's body and blood to other Christians. But Jesus sends John out with the holy orders to Do This Often. James, and Philip, and unfaithful Thomas certainly have

no birth right by which they can forgive or retain sins. But behold, they are ordered to do so here by the power of Jesus' Word and command.

Welcome to the Church of Christ, where the last are first, where God dies so that sinners might live, where seeing is not believing but believing is seeing, where God is pleased to do heavenly, invisible work through visible means, through these pathways of grace, through water and speaking and body and blood hidden below what looks to be just bread and wine. Rejoice in these Easter presents dear Christian, for they are still yours today. Still Christ goes on sending out his pastors with holy orders: baptize in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, preach my Word, forgive sins, give my body and blood to my children. No matter what poor sinner it was who was sent in your midst to hold this office of the ministry, it's Jesus who has baptized you – and you are his. It's Jesus who declares his amazing forgiveness to you – and you are forgiven. It's Jesus who feeds you his body and blood – and you are fitted for eternal life. So fear not. Christ is risen. Unlock the doors for fear is at an end. There is nothing men can do to you and even the gates of hell are no match for your weapons. For you belong to Christ. He has claimed you. You are His. Peace be with you.

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

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

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