

## **Sermon for April 11<sup>th</sup> 2010 John 20**

**After the glorious services of Easter Sunday, some might expect that we are back to business as usual in the church. But that is not the case. The paschal mystery, the death and resurrection of Christ is the centerpiece of the Christian faith and the liturgical year devotes seven weeks to the Easter season, culminating in Pentecost.**

**Importantly these Sundays are referred to not as Sundays after Easter, but Sundays of Easter. Sunday's fully shaped and embedded in the Easter gospel. For Fifty days the Church lives into the reality of the resurrection, of what it means to be a community shaped by the dying and rising of Christ, by the glorious reality of life victorious over death.**

**John's gospel lesson on this second Sunday of Easter describes what is continuing to happen on that first day of the week, the third day after the crucifixion. As we heard in our gospel lesson last Sunday it was on this morning that Mary Magdalene had gone to the tomb and found the stone rolled away and the tomb empty and after mistaking Jesus for the gardener she recognized Jesus when he spoke her name. Mary Magdalene was the first eyewitness of the risen Christ and she followed Jesus' instructions and went and told the disciples what she had witnessed.**

**But it appears from our gospel lesson today, that the disciples had a hard time believing Mary Magdalene – for it is now evening on the third day and this little band of**

threatened and badly frightened men, were huddled together feeling far from secure. Shut the doors and keep them shut and bolted for we are afraid.

But what these disciples did not realize was that they were behind a bolted door that would not keep the risen Jesus out and suddenly there he was standing among them speaking the words, “peace be with you”.

Not long before Jesus was put to death on the cross he said to his disciples:

*“I have said these things while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, who the father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be*

*afraid. And now I have told you this before it occurs so that when it does occur, you may believe."*

**And now, on this third after Jesus' horrendous death, Jesus is standing among his disciples in that upper room with a proclamation that the peace promised for them in his ministry prior to his death has been fulfilled.**

**This phrase Jesus utters "peace be with you" was the customary greeting of that time and place, but when Jesus said those very words to his disciples that night he had more in mind by far than simply a cordial greeting. What he meant was peace in their own hearts and souls – true peace no matter what they would have to endure.**

**And indeed they had crucial need of that peace. For on the one hand they had failed Christ, sadly and**

**inexcusably. And their guilt must have been  
overwhelming their self-respect wounded and raw. And on  
the other hand, far worse even than that, was the  
incredible fact that up until that moment, in their minds  
Christ had failed them.**

**That night in that upper room the Lord broke in upon  
those disciples in their darkness of disillusionment and  
despair and said to them, I want you to know that  
whatever you have done and whatever you have been, I  
still love you and give you my blessing and want you to  
walk in God's grace with a peace that passes all  
understanding.**

**And this is not all Jesus is saying to them.**

**It becomes evident that the peace Jesus announces is  
not one that can allow the disciples to remain behind**

locked doors. For as soon as the disciples have rejoined in the presence of the lord, Jesus tells them that they have a new status and a new role. They are no longer merely disciples. Now they are apostles as well, sent into the world, just as God sent Jesus himself. "Peace be with you. As the father sent me so I send you."

Clearly this peace with the accompanying changed status and role, pushes the Christian community then and now from behind it's closed and locked doors.

It pushes us to become apostles, sent into mission that involves bearing that very same Holy Spirit that Jesus breathed into his disciples made apostles that night.

Empowered by this peace with the guidance of the Holy Spirit we are sent out of our locked upper safe places

**in order to bear the forgiving, transforming love of God into every sphere of human experience. And if we choose to stay behind those closed, locked doors – no matter how safe it might appear– we will not find this peace.**

**Alone we cannot do it – but Jesus tells us we don't have to do it alone. He breathes on us and says receive the Holy Spirit. He gives us something of his own ways and mind and nature, his own spirit and with something of Christ within us we can confront anything and see it through.**

**Ordinary people, once Christ's spirit has touched and inspired and quickened them, can live and do live, can serve God and do serve God, as they could not do before.**

**Look at these very disciples – how they failed, and yet once**

**this spirit entered into them, how valiant, courageous, and unbreakable they became.**

**We know at times we will fall back to hiding behind locked doors. There will be times that we simply can not go out into that frightening place of pain and suffering.**

**We don't want to open the door to a world of hurt so we go once again to those upper rooms of darkness and lock the door tight.**

**But take heed – Jesus comes again and again to these scared and confused disciples. The disciples have not warranted a second visit by Jesus, but they get one, and a renewed gift of his peace.**

**Thomas is given exactly what he has requested – a chance to see and touch Jesus for himself. Importantly, the story does not tell us that Thomas did touch Jesus, because**

**Thomas touching Jesus is beside the point. The point is Jesus' offer of himself over and over again to people who long to see him. With no questions asked, Jesus offers himself and gives the repeated gift of his presence and his peace. And we can be assured that Jesus will come in to our own deadlocked places again and again with a renewed gift of peace.**

**The Easter story is real, not simply in the trumpet celebrations of last week but as it unfolds in the lives and stories of ordinary people who are regularly tempted by fear and despair.**

**We are an Easter people, called to leave our tightly locked rooms and go out into the world proclaiming this**

glorious good news. It is no wonder that each Sunday before we are sent forth with a blessing we hear the words “the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God and of his Son Jesus Christ.”

May we all with this peace of Christ unlock those doors and go out into the world as Easter people proclaiming the glorious news of the unending alleluia of our Christ who is risen, who is risen indeed.