

Easter 2-April 16, 2023

Baltic and East Nidaros Parish

John 20:19-31

Again, in the House Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

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

**Christ is Risen! Alleluia! He is Risen, Indeed Alleluia!**

Easter is not over. Jesus is very much alive and with us today and every day. But in the first part of the reading for today, for 10 of Jesus' disciples, Easter had not yet begun. These 10 were not celebrating that Jesus was risen from the tomb. The two women who encountered Jesus on Easter morning we are told were overcome with fear AND GREAT JOY. They were already celebrating Easter and proclaiming that Christ was risen. The disciples, however, were still living in fear. This fear was so great that they found a house to huddle together, and they locked the door to keep any Jews out that might be looking for them. And there was one Jew who was now on the loose and was looking for these disciples. Jesus.

There are no barriers that will prevent Jesus from doing what he needs to do. Earlier that day, Jesus was not on the inside of the tomb hoping that the guards would hear his loud echoing cries to let him out of his grave. We just heard that the stone was rolled away, and Jesus was out. The locks that the disciples had put on the door of the house where they were hiding were no challenge for Jesus. Jesus doesn't knock on this door waiting for his disciples to let him in. Jesus doesn't have to pick the lock or break down the door. Jesus simply appears and stands among his frightened disciples.

There was another barrier remaining between Jesus and his disciples that had to be broken into. The fear that was in the minds and hearts of the disciples that when Jesus found them, Jesus would bring up how each one of them had fallen asleep as he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane or how each one of them deserted him as he died on the cross. Peter may have been hiding deepest in the corner as he remembered how Jesus said that he would deny him three times and he did. The barrier that remained between Jesus and them was obvious by the silence of the disciples and their looks of fear on their faces when Jesus appeared and stood among them. Jesus did not have to remind them of this barrier that was separating them. Jesus appeared to break down this last barrier. And he did this as he does all things, with his word. Jesus said, "Peace be with you." Jesus spoke first before showing them his hands and side. Jesus didn't begin by pointing to his body and saying, "See what you did to me." Jesus' first words spoken were words of forgiveness and by showing them his body he showed them what he had done for them. It was not until then that these disciples rejoiced. And just in case, this joy might be overshadowed with doubt and fear again, Jesus repeated, "Peace be with you. As the father has sent me, so I send you."

The disciples might have been afraid to hear that they were being sent as Jesus was sent, but Jesus did not mean that his Father was sending them to the cross as he had been sent. Only Jesus could do that work. But now that that work was finished, Jesus was sending his disciples into the world to forgive sins. These disciples who had witnessed Jesus perform many signs and miracles might have expected discipleship to be something more glamorous and glorious rather than simply telling people that their sins were forgiven. Some of these disciples might have expected that they would be put in charge of organizations that would feed multitudes of people. Some may have wanted to have hospitals named after them and do research that would find cures for diseases as they had watched Jesus do. Some may have wanted to use their skills in building elaborate churches so that others could preach. But this was not what Jesus was sent from heaven to earth to do and it was not what Jesus was sending these disciples to do. Jesus gave them the Office of the Keys and they were about to be sent out to unlock the fears of others in need of hearing words of forgiveness.

*After bringing peace to these 10 disciples and teaching them to bring peace to others, Jesus went on his way. Just as Jesus left the house, Thomas entered the house. In that short amount of time, the disciples had forgotten what words to use to deliver people from their fears. As Thomas walked in the door, instead of saying, "Peace be with you," the disciples said, "We have seen the Lord." Thomas had not received what Jesus gave to these disciples and these disciples did not convince Thomas that he was released from his fears by telling him that they had seen the Lord. They failed to tell Thomas what Jesus said to them and what they were now sent out to tell others.*

*But a week later, the disciples were again in the house and this time Thomas was with them. Jesus then does what he does day after day and week after week, he shows up and delivers peace to all who have ears to hear.*

*It was almost too coincidental how this story of Jesus appearing on the other side of locked doors to deliver good news played out for many of us this past Thursday evening. Our Community Easter Cantata had been invited to deliver the full cantata to the St. Dysmas congregation at the SD State Penitentiary during their usual Thursday evening worship service. There were obvious locked doors that could have prevented us from bringing the story of Easter to these inmates. But just as Jesus appeared in the house where his disciples were gathered, we appeared in the St. Dysmas church where at least 60 inmates were gathered. Just as Jesus did not appear to his disciples to tell them what they had done wrong, there was no need to tell these inmates where they had failed. What they did need to hear was the sound of a key that unlocked their fears by proclaiming what Jesus did for them on the cross and words to remind them that the Easter message is about forgiveness and resurrection. As one of the inmates got up to read the second lesson, he thanked us for bringing Jesus beyond the locked door of the prison so they too could rejoice that Christ was risen, risen for each one of them present to hear this good news.*

*This is why we gathered last week on Easter and why we are again in this house today. To proclaim that Jesus stands with you wherever you are and whatever you are going through. Jesus speaks to you again today, "Peace be with you." Amen*