

Easter 2-April 7, 2024

Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish

1 John 1:1-2:2 and John 20:19-31

“Seen and Heard” Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from his son Jesus Christ who died and lives again for you. Amen

Late in the evening on March 25, I received a text message in response to my request to see when I could get my next haircut. I was hoping to get one before Easter. If you recall, this was the night that we heard that we could have had a big snowstorm. Apparently, some people began to fear what they were hearing about the storm which caused some of them to cancel their appointments, so my hair gal texted me to see if I would be willing to brave the weather and come in early the next morning. I agreed to the appointment and by morning it was evident that heavy snow landed north of us, and I was able to get to my appointment. What we heard might happen was different from what we saw in the morning.

I left my appointment to attend our usual meeting of area pastors to study the texts for Easter Sunday. As soon as I walked into the church, one of the pastors asked me if I had heard the news. I said, “I don’t think so, at least I don’t know what you are talking about.” He said that the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore had been struck by a ship and nearly the whole bridge had collapsed into the harbor. In my ignorance of even knowing there was a bridge by that name and since I had never crossed it, I had trouble picturing what he said had taken place. But he turned the tv on in the conference room in the church and I was able to see what happened and what I once doubted from what I heard, I now believed because of what I saw.

Even if our most trusted friends tell us something that has happened, we are more likely to believe it to be true when we hear the same thing from more people. Then if we see for ourselves what we heard, we have even more confidence that what we heard is true.

John’s account of the resurrection of Jesus has Jesus appearing first to Mary Magdalene. She doesn’t recognize Jesus when she sees him. She assumed that the man that was talking to her was the gardener and she essentially accuses him of taking the body of Jesus from his grave and moving it to another place. Seeing the resurrected Jesus did not convince her who he really was. It wasn’t until she heard his voice say her name, “Mary” that she turned to him and called him teacher. Seeing didn’t hurt anything, but seeing was not believing for Mary Magdalene. Hearing Jesus speak moved her from uncertainty to complete faith.

Now that Mary had seen Jesus and heard his voice, she found the disciples and, in her excitement, announced to them, “I have seen the Lord.” She even told them that Jesus had spoken to her. And this is where today’s gospel reading from John begins, which is the evening of the first Easter. The disciples did what many people do who doubt or fear what Jesus might do. They went into hiding. They did what Adam and Eve did when they doubted what God said to them in the garden of Eden. They hid from God. But it is not the will of God or Jesus to leave people fearful and in hiding. It is the will of God to create faith by showing himself to those in hiding and then speaking words of reassurance and forgiveness.

Mary Magdalene’s announcement of what she had seen and heard was not enough to create faith in the disciples. They had to see and hear for themselves to believe. So, Jesus went to the house where the disciples had hidden themselves and had locked themselves from everyone who attempted to find them. Locked doors need a key and Jesus had just the key they needed most. The key Jesus used didn’t unlock the doors of the house. The key Jesus was about to use would unlock their troubled hearts.

Without any mention of the doors of the house swinging open, Jesus just appears in front of the disciples inside of the room where they were hiding. John records that Jesus came and stood among them. It would have been interesting to know how long Jesus stood there. I don't think it would have to be very long before Jesus would have seen the fearful looks on the faces of the 10 disciples that were in the room. The disciples didn't rejoice when they saw the Lord. It wasn't until after Jesus unlocked their hearts with only four words that were the first words out of his mouth. Jesus didn't say, "I've been looking for you!" Jesus didn't stare at Peter and say, "Didn't you say that you would never deny me?" Jesus didn't show the piercings of his hands and side and say, "You did this to me." Jesus didn't wait for his disciples to tell him how sorry they were before he forgave them. Jesus saw their confession of their sin in their faces, and he spoke the words that forgave them of their sin. Jesus said, "Peace be with you." It was after hearing Jesus that rejoiced in who and what they saw.

When they first saw Jesus, no doubt they also saw where the nails had pierced Jesus' hands and the piercings in his side. When they first saw Jesus, they were afraid because they saw their sin. But when Jesus said, "Peace be with you", the disciples realized that the sin that was once theirs had been taken away and Jesus showed them where their sin had gone. Jesus didn't show them so that they would forever feel guilty for what they had done. Instead, they rejoiced and believed what Jesus said he would do by dying and rising again and now it had been accomplished.

Ten disciples had all seen the same thing. When Thomas returned to the house a week later, these ten announced, "We have seen the Lord." It wasn't just one person, but ten people that Thomas should have known well by now. But these ten witnesses were not enough for the one disciple Thomas who was absent when Jesus first came and stood among them. You remember the story of what Jesus did when the one sheep had strayed away from the 99. He went after the one that was lost. And a week later, Jesus went after the one lamb, Thomas. Thomas said unless HE saw the marks of the nails in Jesus' hands and his hand in his side, he would not believe. Once again, Jesus came and stood among the ten and Thomas and said the same thing he did the week before. This time it was so everyone heard, "Peace be with you."

Jesus had now unlocked the troubled hearts of all his disciples. Now that these disciples had moved from doubt to belief after seeing and hearing the Lord, Jesus does something quite amazing with the keys to the kingdom. Jesus handed them over to his disciples to use. Jesus gave these disciples the authority to forgive and retain sins just as he had forgiven them. Jesus instructed these disciples how to use them just as he had used the key to forgive their sins. Jesus said, when you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven. The disciples were not to schedule any follow up appointments that would be necessary to see if the sins were still gone. When the people heard they were forgiven they would be able to picture the nail scars on the hands of Jesus and see that Jesus had taken their sins away, forever and like the disciples, they were free to rejoice in this spoken word of forgiveness.

You have reason to rejoice today as well. You too can picture your sins on Jesus that he took to the cross on Good Friday. They are no longer clinging to you. Jesus has come and stood among you and used the key to unbind your sin and given you the same key to forgive others. Jesus has unlocked whatever might be troubling your heart with his words of peace. You might have even been here last week, and you might come back again next week. Jesus has the same words for you to hear whenever he appears. "Peace be with you." and "Blessed are you who have not seen but have come to believe." Amen