

Quasimodogeniti, the Second Sunday of Easter  
April 11, 2010

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University Lutheran Chapel  
Minneapolis, Minnesota

✠ Jesu juva ✠

PEACE ACHIEVED AND GIVEN

I John 5:4-12; John 20:19-31

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

**D**esus entered the upper room that Easter day and proclaimed the fulfillment of all He was sent to do. The prophets spoke of it long ago. Micah said that the Lord would send “One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting”... And this One shall be peace”; and Isaiah called Him: “Prince of Peace”; and through Ezekiel the Lord promised: “I will make a covenant of peace with them, and it shall be an everlasting covenant with them.” Throughout the Old Testament there is this goal of being at peace with the Lord. There were peace offerings, prayers for peace, false prophets proclaiming peace where there was no peace; and the legitimate prophets repeating the Lord’s promise delivering real and everlasting peace in the person of the Messiah. And then, at Jesus birth, the angels announce that the One who would be Peace has come: “Glory to God in the Highest and on earth Peace.”

But it was not until Good Friday that the Peace was actually achieved; and not until Easter Day that it was at last proclaimed and given. And so Jesus’ first words to His disciples are simply that declaration: “Peace be with you.” And then after showing them the proofs of His resurrection, proofs of the reality of His living body, He says it again: “Peace to you.” And everything that was promised before through angel and through prophet is brought to fruition! Christ is risen from the dead; and all that stood between man and God; every barrier created by sin and rebellion, by death and condemnation, is removed. Jesus, having taken all sin on Himself, and having died, now shows Himself alive and victorious over all of it.

And so what else was there to say that is not included in this greeting: Peace to you. It is as if Christ is saying: “I have removed all of your sins and borne them myself. I have taken on your death. I have battled the devil in your place. And I have overcome each of these things for you. You are now freed from their power and released from their doom. God the Father now welcomes you into His kingdom with open arms; for I am risen from the dead and have won this for you. Peace to you.”

But there was one disciple who was not with them that Easter Day. There was one of the eleven who was still without the Lord’s peace; who, though he had heard the testimony of the other ten, still did not believe; who had said that he needed not only to see and hear the risen Christ, but also to actually insert his fingers into His wounds in order to believe; who probably thought the others completely delu-

sional. And so Jesus comes to them again, a week later, and again says to them: "Peace to you!" And now that Thomas too may have this peace, he has him insert his fingers into the nail prints and thrust his hand into the wound in his side. And at last Thomas too believes, and receives the peace that Christ had won.

We learn several things from all of this. First, we see that peace can only be had from Christ; and comes through an encounter with the risen Lord. The ten did not find peace when Mary Magdalene confessed to them that Jesus was alive. They did not receive peace when they heard from the two disciples on the Emmaus road that they had met the living Christ. They only found peace when Jesus came to them and gave it to them. And so Thomas also did not have peace until he too encountered Christ.

Second, we see here that the peace won by Christ is given by His own declaration. Again, it was not through Mary or the Emmaus disciples or the ten, but through the Word of Christ Himself that Thomas finally receives it.

Third, we see that the peace won and declared must also be believed if it is to be enjoyed by the one to whom it has been given. The peace that Christ won is an accomplished fact. It does not depend on the faith of anyone. He has died and He has risen. Sin is done away with. Death is destroyed. Satan is silenced and condemned. But what good do these facts do a person if he or she doesn't believe it to be true; if he or she continues living as if these things have not happened. Such a person is living a lie, to be sure; but they believe the lie, and so the truth does them no good. The benefits of Christ's peace are only received if the peace is acknowledged and believed. And so faith was necessary on the part of the ten disciples and on the part of Thomas, who finally confesses his faith, saying: "My Lord, and My God."

And now St. John says to each of us who have heard his Gospel this day: "Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name." These Scriptures are not only the apostle's witness about what he has seen and heard, but having been inspired and empowered by the Holy Spirit, are God's own testimony. And again St. John says in his first Epistle: "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater." Yes, through the Scriptures, God actually is at work and is speaking to us. Here we learn of all that He has promised and of all that He has done to bring us peace. And again, these things are written that you may believe and actually receive the peace of Christ that is proffered you.

And what is told you in the Scriptures is proclaimed to you through the threefold witness spoken of by St. John in today's epistle lesson. He says: "[Jesus] came by water and blood... And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth... [T]here are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one." John is telling us that this is how Jesus came before, by water and by blood, with the Holy Spirit; for Christ came as a

child through the waters of the womb and shed His blood through circumcision; and as an adult through the Jordan in baptism at the beginning of His ministry and at the end on Calvary shedding His blood. And all along the way He preached and taught and the Spirit was attendant upon His Word, creating faith and bestowing peace.

And this is how He comes to us now also, by water, by blood, and with the power of the Holy Spirit. Water – Holy Baptism where you encounter Christ Jesus through waters comprehended by His command and connected to His Word; where Christ brings you through spiritual death and resurrection in Him, and where you are clothed with His righteousness and united to His body. Blood – both Baptism and Communion, for in the one you are washed in His blood and your sins are removed, your garments are made white, and in the other you drink and are enlivened and empowered by it. And there is also preaching and teaching that go along with these Sacraments, so that the Gospel may be known, and so that the Spirit, attendant still upon the Word of Christ may through each of these things do His work, creating and strengthening, building and nourishing, your faith that you too may believe and receive Christ's peace.

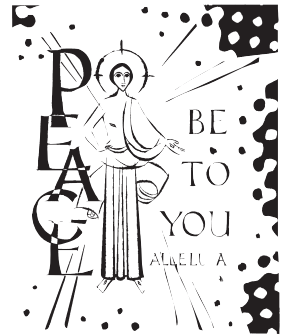
And when Jesus proclaimed that peace in the upper room, He then said to the ten disciples gathered there: "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." And from henceforth we call them the apostles, the sent ones. But what does Jesus mean when he says "As the Father has sent Me..." Obviously Jesus is not talking here about His miraculous birth or other events unique to Himself. What He is speaking about here is His role as the Father's servant and ambassador, of His authority as the one who acts on the Father's behalf; and of His faithfulness to the Father's purposes and commands. Time and again Jesus expresses that He is sent by the Father for a specific purpose; that He speaks only what the Father has given Him to speak; that He does not act merely on His own authority, but on the authority of the Father who sent Him; that He does only what the Father has willed; that He keeps the Father's Word and proclaims it. He is so much the representative of the Father on earth that when Philip asks Him to show them the Father, He says to Philip: "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father."

Now Jesus sends His apostles out in the same manner. These apostles are to go out as His legal representatives. They are to speak and to act on His behalf. They are to speak only what He has given them to speak. They are bound as He was bound to the Father, to be faithful to His Word. And so they will do the things He has given them to do. And when they speak and act as apostles they do so with His authority. And so Jesus continues by saying to them: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." And we believe that this forgiveness and retention, because Christ has said it is so, is just as valid and certain on earth and in heaven as if Christ Himself were speaking it; for they have been sent as He was sent, and now the Holy Spirit is attendant upon their words and upon their actions in Christ's stead, just as He was upon Jesus' own words and actions.

This did not die out with the apostles, but was handed on to the pastors of the Church, which is an office that the apostles themselves equated to their own in terms of the delivery of Christ's Word and Sacraments. The Augsburg Confession (AC V), that statement of faith to which all Lutherans are bound and hold to be true and faithful, says quite simply: "That we may obtain this faith, the Ministry of Teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted."

Remember, to take advantage of the peace Christ has won for you, three things must happen. First you must encounter Christ. Where does that happen? Through the proclamation of the Gospel and the giving of the Sacraments, through the testimony of the Spirit, the Water and the Blood. Second, the peace must be declared to you. The Gospel and Sacrament don't just fall upon you from out of nowhere. I mean, Baptism doesn't happen to you automatically whenever you happen to get wet. Not every meal is the Lord's Supper. And the Holy Spirit doesn't preach to you out of the ether. God uses men to do these things for you and to proclaim the Gospel to you. And third, you must believe it if you are receive the benefits. And so that you may believe, Christ has given His authority to His apostles and pastors so that you can be certain that they speak and act for Him. Their giving and proclaiming, their binding and loosing, means nothing if He is not at work through them actually doing it. But His authority and Word and promise have been given. And these things are valid and certain because of it.

And thus the threefold witness of Spirit, of Water, and of Blood is made. By the proclamation and giving of the Gospel, the testimony not just of a man, but of God Himself is heard. And thus you have Christ's peace; for receiving these things Christ comes to you, through as it were the closed doors of water, of a man's voice in preaching and absolution, of bread and of wine, and stands among you. I call them closed doors, for no one else could enter through such things. And yet Christ Jesus does it; and is truly, though invisibly, present with us in them. He does it so that you, though not seeing, might like Thomas and the other apostles believe on His resurrection. He does it so that you might be forgiven and enlivened. He does it so that you might share in His victory. He does it so that you can have what was promised so long ago, what was longed for throughout the ages, what was proclaimed by the angels, and what was accomplished by Him. He does it to say to you: Peace to you. Amen.



✠ Soli Deo gloria ✠