

4.27.2025 Easter 2

Pastor Timothy McKenzie

Acts 5:27-32; Psalm 118:14-29; Revelation 1:4-8; John 20:19-31

“Jesus comes with peace”

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

Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia! Today’s gospel begins on Easter evening in a room of doubt and fear. The disciples had lost their teacher who was the source of their hope and joy. They had lost any sense of being disciples, let alone any hope of continuing the work of Jesus. Yet Jesus came to his disciples in that locked room, saying, “*Peace be with you.*”

The disciples had no doubt heard from Mary Magdalene the good news that Jesus had appeared to her, yet they remained behind locked doors. Knowing they were afraid, Jesus sought them out, stood among them, and showed them his hands and his side. Jesus said a second time, “*Peace be with you,*” moving the disciples from fear to joy, from doubt to faith. Jesus is the peace that surpasses all understanding; he is the shalom restoring us in body, mind, and spirit, restoring us to one another and to God.

Jesus then says, “*As the Father has sent me, so I send you.*” The word Jesus uses, for “sent” *apostello* (ἀποστέλλω), means to send as a messenger, as an apostle bearing the good news of peace and life. With his peace, Jesus makes apostles out of disheartened disciples. Freed by his peace and commissioned as his apostles, Jesus then breathed on them, saying, “*Receive the Holy Spirit.*” Jesus’ breathing of the Holy Spirit reminds us of Genesis, when God filled humanity with the breath of life (Gen. 2:7). Jesus’ voice and breath now fill the disciples with a new Spirit of life and hope.

This is what Jesus continues to do this for us. With his Spirit, like them, we also become his breath, his life, and his voice in the world. We are filled with his shalom and his Spirit, becoming apostles bearing the good news of new life in him. Jesus sends us to be apostles of God’s love for all people.

At the center of the good news is forgiveness. God never tires of forgiving. In Matthew, Jesus told Peter to forgive “*Not seven times, but seventy times seven*” (Matt. 18:22). Jesus also gives us the Easter work of his forgiveness. It’s helpful to remember that Jesus taught his disciples to pray: “*forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.*” In giving the power to forgive and to retain forgiveness, Jesus is reminding us that we are forgiven as we forgive others. So I ask: when have your sins been retained, when have you remained unforgiven because you have not forgiven someone? When, in your desire for retribution and judgment upon someone, have your sins been retained rather than forgiven? Jesus wants us to grow in forgiveness by forgiving and by accepting forgiveness.

Thomas was not present that evening, and when the disciples told him, “*We have seen the*

Lord,” Thomas said, “*Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.*” Thomas’s words remind me of his conversation with Jesus, when Jesus said, “*And you know the way to the place where I am going.*” Thomas’s response, “*Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?*” reveals a quick mind and an inquiring spirit. He wanted to know the way to the Father, so Jesus said to him, “*I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*” A week after Easter, Thomas was again quick and questioning.

There is a baroque painting by Caravaggio, titled *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas*, in which Thomas is depicted as if he were blind. In the painting, the locked room with doors and windows shut is filled with darkness and Christ radiates the only source of light. Caravaggio’s painting depicts the moment when Christ himself guides Thomas’s hand, placing it in his side. Though Thomas boldly spoke of wanting to see, Thomas was in darkness. Thomas was blind to faith as the only way we come to know and see God. Thomas insisted on knowing Jesus by the power of his own sight and intellect. He could not yet see that divine knowledge comes only in a letting go that allows us to see God through the eyes of faith. This is not “blind faith,” for faith is never blind. Faith is a way of seeing and knowing beyond what we sense and know. Truly, we walk by faith and not by sight.

The story of Jesus and Thomas is about knowing God. It is about “a knowing” that happens only through believing. We are each a bit like Thomas. Like Thomas, we want to know the way to the Father, but we want to do it “my way.” Jesus’ words, “*I am the way, and the truth, and the life,*” are often read at funerals because they remind us: Jesus is the way out of death and darkness. Jesus is light in the darkness; he is the life and hope of the resurrection.

So again, I ask: when has Jesus come to you when you were locked in our own doubts and fears? When has Jesus come to you when you had lost your way, or when you no longer knew the truth? When did he free you from a dark place that held you captive? When did you realize that with Jesus, you saw yourself and your neighbor anew?

With the story of Thomas and Jesus, we come full circle from the beginning of John’s gospel. Thomas’s words, “*My Lord and my God!*” remind us of John 1:1, “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*” Freed from his own spiritual blindness, Thomas saw God in the risen Christ. John’s gospel tells us that the Word of God was coming into the world with life and light, and Thomas came to believe, see and confess Jesus as God. Again, I ask: like Thomas, when have you experienced God with you in a new start or a new beginning? When, in darkness and death, have you experienced the grace of Jesus standing with you, offering new life and hope?

Today's gospel ends with a blessing. Jesus blesses everyone in the future who will live by faith rather than sight: "*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.*" The Easter blessing is that Jesus continues to stand among us. He searches us out of those dark places of remorse and fear, illness and addiction, doubt and greed, nationalism and hatred, saying, "*Peace be with you. Receive the Holy Spirit. Go in my name to forgive. Do not doubt but believe.*" Jesus stands beside you daily that you might abandon yourself into his love, that you might know and serve him in your neighbor.

Yet like Thomas, we often resist, insisting on our own sight, and so we often lose our way. Like Thomas, we often live only on the surface of what we see and touch. We judge people by the color of their skin, their appearance, their accent, their perceived identity, their clothing as a signifier of social class. We judge others by how we see them: are they are friend or foe, gay or straight, a familiar face and ally, or a stranger or a foreigner? Like Thomas, we are all in need of the insight of faith that frees us with his peace and forgiveness to meet others as they are. To be Easter people is to know the peace, forgiveness, and freedom of Christ at the very center of our being.

We live in a world hungering for forgiveness, yet very often unable to forgive. We live in a world where many claim to speak the truth, only to change their minds again and again. We live in a world unable to find its way out of the darkness of war and into the light of peace, a world unable to forgive and release sisters and brothers from captivity to the judgement of darkness. We are often unable to see the light of Christ in our neighbor.

The experience of Easter is to be released from sin and death, from hatred and nationalism, and every lifeless tomb and locked room where people live in fear and doubt.

In a world bent upon destroying humanity, Christ comes to restore our humanity.

Jesus is the fulfillment of the Hebrew law and prophets – of loving God and loving neighbor. In Jesus, God offers peace, hope, and life to all people.

Jesus is peace. He is shalom, restoring us in body, mind and spirit to one another and to God.

In a world longing for peace, Jesus comes with peace so that you might become his peace.

Amen.