

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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First Sunday After Easter, April 16, 2023

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 204, 187, 208:1-4, 196, 188:6.

Lessons: Isaiah 41:8-14, 1 Corinthians 1:18-31, Luke 24:36-49.

Sermon Text: John 20:19-22

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltrittter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

If you have been paying any attention at all to world news, you realize that many in the world are hoping that there will be peace among nations in the world. For more than a year there has been war in Ukraine, and fighting in many parts of the world. Some people are even fearing that a nuclear war or a third world war may erupt because of Russia's invasion of the country of Ukraine.

Wouldn't peace among nations be great? Even on a more personal level, wouldn't peace among people be great?

Well, on the evening of the day of his resurrection, Jesus brought his disciples a message of peace. But what does he mean when he said "***Peace be with you!***"? Today let's look again at

JESUS' MESSAGE OF PEACE

1. **His disciples were gathered together in fear,**
2. **But on the day of his resurrection, Jesus appeared to his followers with the message "*Peace be with you!*"**
3. **How does that apply to you?**

On Easter Sunday people were not afraid to gather publicly in our churches to worship Jesus and publicly hear what Jesus has to say in his Word. You heard about the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the eternal salvation that is yours if you hold fast to the message of Jesus' resurrection. But on the day of his resurrection, the followers of Jesus were afraid.

Let's go back to that day and look in on the disciples of Jesus that evening. We read that "***the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews.***"

They had gathered in a place behind locked doors. Those who had followed Jesus were afraid of what might happen to them. Followers of Jesus had seen him crucified, dead, and buried. And some strange things had happened on this day, the third day since he died. They really weren't quite sure what had happened since he was buried. They weren't sure of what the facts were and what to believe.

The women had come back from the tomb and told some of them that the tomb was empty and that angels had given them a message. Peter and John had run to the tomb and discovered it was empty. Then there was the story being told among the Jews that some of the followers of Jesus had stolen the body of Jesus. Those gathered together at this time in this place knew that wasn't true. They hadn't stolen Jesus' body. But they were afraid.

Then some men who had walked to the village of Emmaus returned with a really amazing story. They had been walking and a stranger joined them wondering why they were sad, downcast, and looked discouraged. They talked to the stranger "***About Jesus of Nazareth, ... [who] was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was***

alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.” Luke 24:19-24 (NIV) That stranger, of course, was Jesus himself.

So the Apostle John tells us that these disciples of Jesus were gathered behind locked doors, afraid of the Jews. After all, the Jews – not only the leaders of the Jews but many of the lay-people – had demanded the crucifixion of Jesus. The leaders of the Jews had executed their teacher, their master, their leader, their Lord, the man they believed would be their Savior.

They were afraid of other people, and especially had a fear of the majority of the Jews.

With their leader executed, what would happen to them? Didn't they have good reason to be afraid? Afraid that they might be hunted down and thrown into prison and maybe even executed, too, for believing things that Jesus said and for following him? After all, many of them had publicly been supporting Jesus of Nazareth.

Had they forgotten God's promises found in the words of the prophets in their Holy Scriptures? Isaiah had written *“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. All who rage against you will surely be ashamed and disgraced; those who oppose you will be as nothing and perish. Though you search for your enemies, you will not find them. Those who wage war against you will be as nothing at all. For I am the LORD, your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you. Do not be afraid, O worm Jacob, O little Israel, for I myself will help you,” declares the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.*” Isaiah 41:10-14 (NIV)

And again: *“Hear me, you who know what is right, you people who have my law in your hearts: Do not fear the reproach of men or be terrified by their insults.”* Isaiah 51:7 (NIV)

Isaiah also wrote: *“Do not be afraid; you will not suffer shame. Do not fear disgrace; you will not be humiliated.”* Isaiah 54:4 (NIV)

The prophet Zephaniah had written: *“On that day they will say to Jerusalem, ‘Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands hang limp. The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing.’”* Zephaniah 3:16-17 (NIV)

And the prophet Haggai had written: *“‘But now be strong,’ ... declares the LORD. ‘Be strong, all you people of the land,’ declares the LORD, ... ‘For I am with you,’ declares the LORD Almighty. ‘This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. And my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear.’”* Haggai 2:4-5 (NIV)

A week earlier the disciples of Jesus had been among the crowd welcoming Jesus into Jerusalem riding on a donkey and shouting these words: *“Do not be afraid, O Daughter of Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt.”* John 12:15 (NIV)

Had they forgotten all those words from God? They were really troubled. They were afraid of what the Jews could do to them.

That's the nature of sin. Satan wants to bother us in any way he can. He wants to give us all the trouble he can. But we must turn to God and to his Word for comfort, for peace.

They had also heard these words from their Master, the Savior himself: *“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”* Matthew 10:28 (NIV)

Those words especially should have given them comfort when they were afraid. Jesus had made it clear that men can only kill the body. God is the one who can destroy both body and soul in hell.

The question should have been ‘what can man do to us? Kill us? Take our earthly lives away?’ But that is all. Men may even torture us, and mankind has come up with some pretty horrible tortures. They can only kill the body but not the soul. And what is the end result for the Christian of torture and even earthly death? For everyone who believes in Jesus Christ as Savior, earthly death is but the door to eternal life with Jesus in heaven.

These words of comfort are intended by God for us, too.

Yes, from an earthly point of view, they had many unknown things to fear.

But look who appeared in their midst: *“Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you!’ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you!’”*

The very one they had seen dead on the cross and even laid in the tomb now appeared among them!

Luke tells us more. He writes about this event: ***“Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, ‘Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.’ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, ‘Do you have anything here to eat?’ They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence. He said to them, ‘This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.’ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, ‘This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”*** Luke 24:36-49 (NIV)

Jesus gives them words of peace, peace for their troubled hearts and minds. He was the one of whom angels announced at his birth ***“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”*** Luke 2:14 (KJV) And now the events which bring peace to mankind have been completed. Now his message of peace is delivered.

This was not an earthly peace, like people are now hoping for in the world, that wars of nation against nation and person against person would end.

This is a far greater peace. This is peace with God, eternal peace, knowing that God is not angry with us because of our sins. God is not at war with us because of our sins because Scripture plainly tells us that ***“God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them.”*** 2 Corinthians 5:19 (NIV)

And this kind of peace will give our hearts and minds peace and comfort no matter what is going on in our lives. This message of peace was given on the evening of the day of Jesus' resurrection. This message of peace is given to you on this day, too.

You have probably experienced the fact that many people have no use for Christ. You may even have experienced or will experience mockery, scorn, and even hatred because you believe in Jesus as your Savior, and you believe the Bible is God's holy, inspired Word.

Yes, as Christians we often have fear of others, fear of the majority. We are afraid that others will say hurtful things to us and about us. We are afraid that others may even harm us or arrest us and throw us into jail because of what we believe and because of the truth of God's Word which we speak. But remember Jesus' words when you are troubled by anything: ***“Peace be with you!”***

Believe that, clinging firmly to the truth, and you have all the peace Jesus brings! Amen.