

"Peace in The Midst of Fear and Doubt" John 20:19-31

¹⁹ When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." ²² When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." ²⁴ But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "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." ²⁶ A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." ²⁸ Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." ³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹ But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name. New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

Sisters and Brothers, Alleluia, Christ is Risen! He has Risen. Indeed!
Today as last week we gather to say Alleluia, Christ is Risen he is risen Indeed!

Let us pray, God of signs and wonders, breathe new life into us this day, that our spirits may awaken to the joy and the hope of our glorious inheritance through the living Christ. Clear our vision, Holy One, that we may see the promise of Easter in the stirrings of this precious earth and in the life energy flowing through our bodies.

Help us find the faith to believe where we have not seen that others may see, in our living and our loving, the glory of the risen Christ. Amen

The disciples had gone into hiding in our gospel story. The disciples are locked in a room Judas is dead, and Thomas is somewhere else, he is missing in action.

The disciples are hiding in a locked room for fear of the Jews. Why would they have a fear of the Jews if they are Jewish?

Their fear comes from knowing that several influential Jewish leaders had persuaded Pilate to kill Jesus; furthermore, Jesus' disciples feared that they might be the next martyrs.

The disciples were overtaken **by fear**.

The disciples left their daily lives and vocation to follow Jesus.
They had staked their lives on him.

Now their leader was dead, and their lives were in shambles. Many would agree that their lives were in chaos.

At times I wonder if the disciples were afraid of Jesus; let me explain. The disciples kept their distance from Jesus when Jesus was arrested, they deserted him, and one of the disciples denied Jesus three times.

The only exception was the beloved disciples whom Jesus loved, who was at the cross with Jesus and Jesus's mother. If you can recall, Jesus tells the beloved disciple to take his mother into his home.

Perhaps the last person, the disciples, want to encounter that evening was Jesus, who had been raised from the dead to bring words of joy along with words of comfort to their hearts; **which needed restoration and healing.**

Earlier that week, the disciples had heard from Mary that Jesus was alive. Be we know how that goes. You can't believe everything you see much more; you can't believe everything you hear.

I can imagine Peter saying yea, right you think you saw him, do you have another fairytale story to share with us? Peter perhaps adds another statement to his comments, "**Mary get over it, he is dead, let's get on with the program.**

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week and the doors of the safe house where the disciples took up residency were locked. However, Jesus goes right through the locked door, Jesus came into the room his first words were **peace be with you.**

!The Locked doors cannot keep the resurrected Jesus from entering a room full of fear and disillusionment!

The disciples needed to hear a word that would bring solace to their broken mended hearts, "peace be with you. His greeting "peace be with you" carries the sense of the Hebrew greeting "Shalom," a blessing that connotes more than tranquility, but a deep and holistic understanding of well-being, the kind of peace that the world cannot give. It's a unique peace that only God can provide for us.

Jesus demonstrated to them his hands and his side.

Afterward, Jesus gives the disciples marching orders.

The disciples are commissioned to continue Jesus' mission of revealing God to the world. Jesus tells them if they forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.

Furthermore, the disciples were instructed to help people with their unbelief. Equally essential, to embrace the revelation of God in the person of Jesus.

For some reason or another, Thomas was absent and missed out on Jesus' first post-resurrection visit with his disciples. The disciples enthusiastically informed Thomas of their experience with the risen Christ. Thomas communicates the following with the disciples: "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."

Although our good friend, brother Thomas has received a negative reputation as "doubting Thomas." Thomas was honest; all he was asking for was proof that it is Jesus of Nazareth. Perhaps the Good News is too good to be true, he thinks to himself.

Better yet, It appears to me that Thomas was saying, how could it be that this one who had disappointed their hopes, this one who had been executed for crimes against the state-how could this one be the one God had raised. Thomas is honest with his colleagues. I just doubt what you are telling me unless I see and touch for myself.

The wonder of it all is that the resurrected Jesus shows up again one week later to provide precisely what Thomas needed.

They are again behind locked doors, Jesus appears to them **and says, "peace be with you,"** Thomas, you are invited to touch me, put your finger here. Jesus invites Thomas to witness him as the resurrected Lord.

Jesus honors Thomas's request.

He does not do so, however, in private, but among the gathered disciples. I believe that this encounter presupposes the idea of community and its need to struggle together with our very own issues of fear and doubt.

Afterward, Thomas says! "My Lord and my God! Many have commented that Thomas's response is one of the highest Christological confession of anyone in the holy gospels.

Jesus honors Thomas's request. Jesus does not scold Thomas for not believing the other disciples.

Jesus understood that Thomas did not understand what God was up too. Thomas did not have unbelief, Thomas believed in God in Jesus as Messiah

Thomas was in a wavering state of mind. He was not quite sure what is right or what to believe in.

Maybe just maybe when Thomas heard the other disciples that Jesus was raised from the dead, he wanted to believe that they were right, but it seemed too good to be true. Thomas doubted the words of the disciples; he thought they were suffering from hallucinations.

My good friends today, our resurrected Lord, comes to us with a **kind word amid our fears and doubt** about life in general and the future. God knows we need to hear a kind and comforting word today.

While we can pass judgment on both the disciples and Thomas, let's be honest with each other, don't we all have our moments when fear overcomes us, and we lock ourselves in an emotional room, and we do not know how to leave the locked room. We get stuck in our fears along with doubt; moreover, we do not know what to do next.

We stay in our emotional beds with the covers pulled over our heads-to run away from life's challenges.

At times we are like Thomas; we have our moments when we cannot understand what God is doing in the world.

We are also like the disciples we have our moments of fear of the present and the future.

My good sisters and brothers, today the resurrected Christ comes to us in the midst of our fears and doubts the risen Christ say to us, "Peace be With You"!

At times we are like **Mother Teresa**, who did so much for people living in poverty, she also has become an icon of faith and of humanitarian service and her faithfulness to God. She founded the Missionaries of Charity. An organization which has fed millions, and cared for the sick as well as the dying. She led an exemplary life of faith. However, in several letters written to her spiritual mentor, she once wrote the following: "I am told that God lives in me, and yet the reality of darkness and coldness and emptiness is so great that nothing touches my soul. Where I try to raise my thoughts to heaven, there is such convicting emptiness that those very thoughts return like sharp knife's and hurt my very soul." Mother Theresa had her moments of doubt and moments of alienation from God.

Beloved in the Lord, we too have our moments of fear and doubt; however, we are reminded that we are a community that still has hope in the resurrection of Jesus. Yes, life has become challenging for all of us. Many are afraid, and fear is conquering our minds on top of that our spirits have surrendered to fear. Fear has paralyzed and stopped us in our tracks but, here at "Grace Lutheran Church, we do not stop in the name of fear, we stop in the name of LOVE!"

There is a segment in our gospel story that continues to speak us today. When the disciples had fear and hid behind lock doors. Likewise, when Thomas doubted the words of the other ten disciples. The resurrected Lord never reprimanded them for allowing fear to overcome them or Thomas for doubting.

The resurrected Lord embraced their imperfection and loved them. Jesus understood that fear and doubt would lead them as well as us into faith and trust.

What Jesus did was: He breathes the Holy Spirit upon them.

Today, Jesus gives us peace and breaths on us the Holy Spirit so that we can continue living our lives with peace and tranquility of heart. Amen

Let us pray:

Even though we have not seen the Lord, we can still love God.

Even though we cannot touch God's hands, we can still believe.

Gathered here as the body of Christ, and seeing Christ's love in one another, we can say without a doubt: We have seen the Lord! When we witness the hands that touch us and behold the eyes that shine Christ's love and peace, we can proclaim with faith: My Lord and my God!

Do not doubt, but believe.

Benediction:

Through Christ, God has given us new birth into a living hope. God has given us an inheritance, which is imperishable and undefiled.

Furthermore, it is unchanging inheritance protected by the power of God.

Rejoice, therefore, even if for a while, we suffer various trials.

Life is stronger than death

love is more durable than hate

joy is more robust than sorrow

and the promise of God is sure

Ending Song:

Because He lives, I can face tomorrow

Because He lives, all fear is gone

Because I know He holds the future

And life is worth a living just because He lives