

"Peace Be With You"

(John 20:19-23)

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Introduction: What if someone wants to be a Christian but really doesn't have faith in the resurrection?

- A. I know, one would then wonder why be a Christian at all? What would be the point right?**
- B. But there are many reasons why people go to church and/or associate themselves with Christianity.**
- C. Some may do it for profit, for social standing, for a sense of morality, for the feeling of community, for ambition, to please someone else, etc. there are many reasons.**
- D. But in John 20 we are presented with a picture of what a faithless and hopeless "Christians" look like under pressure: they were hiding behind closed doors!**
- E. The text uses the word 'doors' (plural) to indicate that the disciples were in a building that had an outer door and then an inner room that was also able to be bolted.**
- F. They were all inside, with the outer door locked, and they were within an inner room that was also locked. Why?**
- G. Because as our text says, "for fear of the Jews (vs 19)."**
- H. It was common practice that once the Romans had crucified someone guilty of sedition against the state (of course our Lord was falsely accused of this and suffered also a miscarriage of justice), that any of his followers would also be sought out, arrested and not unlikely suffer the same fate.**
- I. There was reason to fear this especially because the Jewish leaders who hated Christ would especially be interested in bringing down Jesus' disciples and would therefore encourage the Romans to arrest them as well.**
- J. Let me remind you of what these Jewish leaders had said to Pilate right after Christ had been buried:**

"Sir, we remember how that imposter said, while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise.' Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last fraud will be worse than the first." – St. Matthew 27:63-64

- K. So we know that the Jewish leaders held the disciples of Jesus suspect and their hatred for Christ overflowed to them.**

- L. The disciples, however, were not only aware of this real threat against them, they were also under the distinct belief that even though Christ's body was not in the tomb (and while this was a great mystery to them), they also believed that Jesus was dead.
- M. He had taught them for three years, they had seen Him do great miracles, but to them all of this was past. He was now dead and the mission was lost. There was only one thing left to do: hide in fear.

Part I: This is what we do in our sin:

- A. O, we are quite good at putting on religious airs.
- B. We can put on the Christian face, speak Christian words, and go through the Christian rituals as we continue to identify ourselves as disciples of Jesus Christ.
- C. After all, He *was* a great teacher and taught us such moral virtues as to love and to forgive; for many postmodern churches today Jesus was the supreme teacher of positive thinking, so that is the message these churches emphasize. For example, with enough faith we can move mountains (Matthew 17:20)! So it does seem to pay to try to get something from this great Messiah who once lived.
- D. We can at least try to use His mental lessons to have more success in our lives here on earth, *but beyond applying Jesus' teaching to our lives today* how easy it is for us to doubt with such powerful and persuasive doubts: that while Easter certainly represents a mystery (we know that *something* unusual occurred), but come on! Jesus actually, bodily coming back from being dead to being alive; going from being torn to disfigurement from the scourging and the crucifixion, to being raised in power and glory? Our sinful nature says, "Hey buddy, wake up, this is the 21st century!"
- E. And so as a result of our unbelief, when the pressure is on we hide in fear just like the original disciples.
- F. Of course, many will object, "Hold on, wait a minute, I don't live in fear!" But you do when you experience these things:
 - 1. When you do not apply the fact of the resurrection of the Lord in your confrontation with sin. Look, if Jesus is dead, then all you can do is react in a fearful or defeated way when you are confronted with temptation. If Jesus is dead, you have no help to resist sin, but all you can do is to give into it over and over again and then try to convince yourself that sin being your master is the normal Christian life.
 - a. This is not to say that genuine Christians do not continue to struggle with sin nor is this to say that we do not sin every single day (of course we do), but now I'm talking about giving in to it and no longer resisting it with the attitude: what's the use?
 - b. If Jesus is dead, then it must be true: there is no help against sin.

c. If Jesus is dead, how can we agree with St. Paul who teaches,
“consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.” – Romans 6:11

2. You also live in fear not only in regards to your confrontation with sin, but also in regards to your confrontation with God’s command to pray, to worship, to serve, and to witness. If Jesus is dead, then why pray? It makes no sense to live in constant prayer; to seek to grow in your devotional life if in the deepest recesses of your heart you don’t believe He’s really alive! Why pray to someone who’s dead?
 - a. Worship is the same way. Why develop a hunger and thirst for the Sacrament of the Altar; to constantly receive the body and blood of the Risen Christ if the Risen Christ is really only the dead Christ? Then Holy Communion is an empty ritual and what you receive is merely cheap bread and wine and frankly therefore, there is nothing special (much less sacred) about going to worship.
 - b. What about service? You must live in fear in this category as well. If Jesus is dead, who is going to replenish what you give to others? If Jesus is dead, then you must fear serving others, because without Christ, you will run out of time, energy, money, and other resources. Therefore it is better to live looking out for #1 and in the meantime, don’t get too close to other people, especially those people who might need your help.
 - c. What about witness? If Jesus is dead, the last thing you want to do is look like a fool or a religious nut by telling people about a “Savior” who is still stuck in the ground. Yes, in our sin, we are just like those disciples who hid behind locked doors.

Part II: Thank God, Jesus did not leave those first disciples in that state of fear, nor does He leave us!

A. Jesus came to them!

“Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.’ And when he said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld.’”

- B. The words, “peace be with you” were very common in the first century Jewish culture. The words were used as a greeting on arrival; as a farewell greeting; and as a gracious form of dismissal: like “go in peace!” (Lenski, 1015-1016)**
- C. But none of these versions of the words are used here.**
- D. When Jesus speaks these words He bestows God’s peace to His people. It is a peace that envelopes our hearts, souls, and minds, not simply informing us (as in receiving information), but covering us with God’s presence to bless our entire being. Simply put: Jesus comes to us and blesses us with the power of His resurrected life. Simply put again: we have nothing to fear anymore!**
- E. When Jesus first spoke these words to His poor fearful disciples, He spoke them by showing them His hands and His side. This was for two reasons:**
 - 1. One was to ensure them that He had actually risen after being dead. These were the wounds that mortally wounded Him; these marks proved that He was once dead! And by virtue of being alive before them, then it was true: He was alive; He was risen! Jesus had conquered death! What problem confronting His people would ever be worse than what the Lord has already defeated?!**
 - 2. The other reason for showing His hands and His side was for the same reason He first spoke, “Peace be with you.” It was Jesus’ very first and most important message to them: they were forgiven, just like you are forgiven through His precious blood which flowed from His hands, His feet, and His side for you! He was making them whole, filling them with peace, through the forgiveness of sins. And you are...**
 - a. Forgiven for all the times you have been ashamed of Jesus.**
 - b. Forgiven for all the times you have denied Him as Peter did.**
 - c. Forgiven for all the times you ran away from Him like all the original disciples did when Jesus was arrested.**
 - d. Forgiven for all the times you were unwilling or “too tired” to pray.**
 - e. Forgiven for all the times you’ve sinned again and again and again, behaving as if Jesus was dead and not alive.**
 - f. Forgiven for all your sin.**
 - g. Forgiven for all your guilt.**
 - h. Forgiven for all your shame.**
 - i. Forgiven for every part of your heart, soul, and mind that has lived as if Jesus never rose.**

Conclusion: His Peace is Yours!

- A. For all of your terrible, horrible sins of rebellion and entanglement with the world, Jesus bestows on you Christian, forgiveness!**

- B. You have the peace of Christ, not because of anything you're supposed to do or try to do, but because He is risen and on account of His victory over death.**
- C. But Jesus didn't stop there. He said it a second time, "*Peace be with you.*" And this time He breathed on them and they received the Holy Spirit. This is not to say that they did not have the Holy Spirit in respect to faith and the forgiveness of sins (they did), but now the Holy Spirit was given to them for a different purpose (and as a result, given to you, the Church of Christ for the same reason):**

So that you would live in the Resurrected LIVING Lord Jesus Christ to also bestow His forgiveness and peace upon others!

- D. We are no longer afraid to share our faith, because as the Church we are the ambassadors of the Lord Jesus Christ. When you know anyone who is burdened by their sin, you are given Christ's authority and power to speak for Jesus: "Your sins are forgiven!" It is only when people choose to hold on to their sins and reject Christ that the keys work the other way.**
- E. For anyone who is tired of denying Christ; for anyone who wants a new life; for anyone who thirsts for the love and mercy of God, you have been given the Holy Spirit through your baptism into Christ (when Christ breathed on you), to forgive just as you have been forgiven.**
- F. This is why all fear is gone!**
- G. By giving us His peace, the Risen Christ has given us new lives and a new mission: know and share His forgiveness dear Christian and let me remind you as to why you can: Alleluia! Christ is risen! [congregation: He is risen indeed! Alleluia]!**