

**John 20:19-31**—On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!”<sup>20</sup> After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

<sup>21</sup> Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”<sup>22</sup> And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”<sup>23</sup> If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

<sup>24</sup> Now Thomas (also known as Didymus<sup>[a]</sup>), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came.<sup>25</sup> So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”

<sup>26</sup> A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!”<sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

<sup>28</sup> Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

<sup>29</sup> Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

<sup>30</sup> Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.<sup>31</sup> But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

### **Sermon Theme: Peace Be With You**

Maybe you’ve heard someone say it. Maybe you’ve said it yourself. We could use some peace these days. A lot of it stems from dealing with COVID-19 and how that has shaped our world. Other times, it’s what we deal with living in this world in general. You want some peace because the children are starting to really get on your nerves and you feel your patience wearing thinner every day. You want some peace with mom and dad who don’t seem to get it. Arguments with your spouse or even their little quirks can rob you of peace in your marriage. You would like some peace when it comes to your financial future. You are wrestling with a sin and it’s leaving you restless and filled with doubts. You wouldn’t mind some peace from the health problems you are already dealing with. You could use some peace because you feel bitter and complaining about so much and so many people. We could go on.

Thomas was a guy looking for peace. Sunday school classrooms haven’t been all too kind to Jesus’ disciple Thomas. Oh, poor Thomas. Foolish Thomas. Doubting Thomas. But why does Thomas become the poster-boy of a doubter? It’s probably because of how brash he was. He has all these other people—his brothers and followers of Jesus—telling him what they had seen and still he rejects it. His demands definitely do not help

him. Until he sticks his finger in the nail holes and thrusts his hand into Jesus' side, he will not believe! Gross. But Thomas is looking for some peace. And he's not finding it when what he hears does not match up with what he is sure to know. Dead people don't come back to life. Life isn't a soap opera where the main character supposedly died in the car crash only to find out in an epic twist that at the last moment he jumped out and now lives! No, Thomas knew Jesus was crucified—he was looking for the nail holes. He knew Jesus died. He knew he was buried with the dead. And, as far as he was concerned, that's where Jesus remains. With Thomas we see that here's a guy trying to hold onto his own peace and so he doubts.

I say poor Thomas because that's me. Like Thomas I struggle to believe when what I am told is not lining up with what I can see or what I think I know. God's Word tells me it is powerful and effective. So why is that person who hears God's Word not making the lifestyle change they truly need and turning from that sin? God's Word tells me he is in control of all things. So why does it look like there is so much chaos? God's Word tells me that God is love! So why do so many continue to suffer and struggle? Why are children stuck in the vicious cycle of their parents' sins? Why does it seem like the harder that I try and more effort I put in, the results just aren't there? God's Word says he will provide for all that I need. How's that going to work out when the bills continue to come and the income isn't keeping up? I'm sure you can relate in some way: you hear God's promises, but they just don't seem to be lining up with what you see.

And so, like Thomas, we can find ourselves making these bargains with God. "Okay, Lord, I will believe you, once you show me." We boldly convince ourselves we know what we need to have peace. We'll have that peace once we see more of God's Word really working in someone's life and we can physically see the proof. We'll have peace once that stimulus check hits the bank account and COVID-19 is behind us. You'll have peace once these struggles are no longer here or you are spared from them. But until you see it, you struggle to believe. And so, because we have those doubts, we do not have peace. It's not just foolish Thomas. It's foolish me. Doubting me.

I say poor Thomas because when I look at the other disciples I'm not seeing rock-solid trusting people at first either. In verse 19 we meet them hiding behind locked doors out fear of the Jewish leaders. They too had the good news shared with them. The women had returned earlier in the day and told them about the empty tomb and how the angel reminded the disciples to meet Jesus in Galilee. But, I'm not seeing anyone jumping up and going. By that time in the evening the disciples who were heading to another town, Emmaus, had run back and told them, "**It is true! The Lord has risen and appeared to Simon**" (Luke 24:24).

And still they are afraid. What were they waiting for? To a point their actions are warranted. They saw what those leaders of the Jews did to Jesus. It's a fair question to ask, "What's going to happen to me?" They simply wanted to have some peace. And they found their peace, in a way. Better safe than sorry. Lock the doors. There's peace in security.

There are so many things in this world that are trying to rob us of our peace. Because of COVID-19 always in our faces and because of life in general on this blue orb called earth we face doubts of what's going to happen next. We have doubts because there's so much we don't know. For some there's more unrest because there's so little that you can make plans for and doubts with things you already planned. Again, where there is doubts, we do not have peace.

To face of that unrest, fears, and doubts we might find ourselves hiding behind our own locked doors. Some will hide behind themselves and what they can do; the old "pull yourself up by the bootstraps" mentality and the strength of mankind! Some hide behind wanting to impress others and being that parent who can do everything. Others hide behind ignoring others and just wanting to impress yourself. Some try and find peace hiding behind mind-numbing alcohol or reality-escaping pornography. Others hide behind their work and needing to busy. Another finds peace in trying to ignore the sin instead of addressing it. And still others find their security and peace in holding onto grudges.

And for a while it works. We have peace. But then the proof you are looking for, or demand, doesn't come. Then those locked doors didn't actually address the issue and maybe it's made things worse. We still have this unrest. The devil loves this unrest because it makes fertile soil for him to sow his seeds of doubt. And those seeds of doubt continue to grow because so often we are turning to the wrong things to give us real peace. We sinfully don't trust that what God gives us and promises is enough. Plain and simple: doubting is not believing. When Jesus tells Thomas to stop doubting, he's telling him, "Stop not trusting and trust. Stop being an unbeliever and believe." There is no room for doubt in our relationship with God. In fact, doubt breaks that relationship and robs us of that which saves us. To doubt, not trust, is sin. It's a sin for which God calls us to repentance.

In the midst of all that fear and doubt all of a sudden there's Jesus standing in their midst and the first thing out of his mouth, "**Peace be with you!**" And when Jesus says, peace, he's not just saying, "Hey, guys!" Showing them his hands and side Jesus then breathes on them and says, "**Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.**" Jesus gives them real peace. He's shows them the wounds he suffered to heal their broken relationship with God. He shows them the physical marks of the punishment he received so that they have peace with his Father in heaven. He's not wishing something for them. This is his gift: a peace that surpasses understanding. This peace will guard and keep them in the true faith until life everlasting no matter what fears or doubts might come their way. It's a peace rooted in our risen and living Savior Jesus. With nail-marked hands and spear-pierced side Jesus shows them he is the Messiah, God's Son and His Chosen one, who brings life and peace in his name.

But Jesus isn't done. Thomas hears the good news but those seeds of doubt strangle faith. What a merciful Savior who does not give as we deserve but deals with his people

in grace. So 8 days later Jesus appears again with the same message, **“Peace be with you!”** And he knows what Thomas needs so he comes to Thomas at his level: **“Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”** And Jesus’ words of peace change a dead unbelieving heart into a living heart of faith that confesses: **“My Lord and my God.”**

In this sin-filled peace-stealing world, Jesus comes to you at your level and says: “Peace be with! I know full well how you are struggling with doubts. I know how you feel yourself tossing and turning trying to find peace. I wrestled with the same things. I’ve struggled just like you. But have peace. Where you were unfaithful, I remain faithful. I did not fall. I did not sin so I can claim your doubts and mistrust as my own. These hands were nailed to the cross for you to pay for those doubts. I bore God’s wrath so that you would have peace with Him. This side was pierced to prove I really did die. But do not worry. That tomb is still empty. Your sin was paid in full. All is well between you and God because I live. Peace be with you! You are a baptized child of God. You have been set free from those doubts and fears. Yes, you will suffer for some time. Yes, those doubts will threaten you and fears will keep coming. But I promise that there will be an end date to all those struggles. It might not be today, tomorrow, next week, months, or even years down the road. But I promise, I’m working them for your good. And the glory that waits for you, already promised at your baptism, is far greater and superior. Until then, I promise: never will I leave you; never will I forsake you. Peace be with you!”

And John writes these words to give you just that. He writes in verse 31, **“These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”** Jesus continues to breathe the Holy Spirit and new life in us. We don’t see him with our physical eyes balls. But with eyes of Spirit-worked faith we see him amongst us in the Word and Sacrament. We can’t put fingers in the nail holes or hands in the spear-pierced side. But we physically touch his flesh and blood given and poured out for the forgiveness of sins in the Lord’s Supper. Peace be with you! Though for a little while we may have to suffer all kinds of troubles, this peace is not something that can be taken from you. It’s an assurance and encouragement rooted in Jesus that it’s all going to be okay. Your sins are still forgiven because your Risen Savior still lives. Nothing in all of creation can separate us from God’s love and the peace that Jesus gives.

Now, go, share that peace. This isn’t something we want to keep to ourselves. There is so much unrest in this world, so many who are bound by fears and doubt. As Jesus gives you peace through his Word, Jesus puts you on as his mask and uses your mouth to share those words of peace with others. Speak it, share it. Peace be with you! Amen.