Easter 2A 2020 Joyous Faith always comes from hearing God’s Peace

As the world is gripped by the fear of the corona virus, social distancing has driven us behind closed doors. The governing authorities have made it illegal for now, to gather as church. On the night of Easter, the disciples were behind locked doors fearing for their lives. It was no virus that terrified them but the likely possibility that the Jews would do to them as what they did to Jesus.

Did the disciples really fear crucifixion more than they feared God?

Could they also have feared Jesus returning to ask them why they betrayed and abandoned Him? What would Jesus do to them since vengeance belongs to God?

The risen Jesus shows up in the locked room and stands in their midst. This is no ghostly apparition or a cheap magic trick. Jesus is exalted now. He no longer humbles himself. He who was arrested, beat up and spit upon only three short days ago, will never again let that happen. His work of salvation is accomplished and has now received all authority in heaven and on earth.

Passing through the cave wall of his burial tomb was no problem. Showing up out of nowhere is no sweat. So what now? What will the exalted Lord do to the idolatrous disciples?

Does he stone them for fearing man more than God? No, He gives them peace. He announced that peace was theirs as He shows them the hands and side that only three days ago were opened at the cross and now He is alive.

By giving them peace Jesus does not overthrow God’s law and commandments. He still upholds the law of God. He endured what the law demands for everyone who breaks it. By his suffering and humiliation He made peace between sinners and God. The scars on his glorified body are God’s proof of lasting peace.

But He is not finished with the forgiven disciples. He sends them out into the world to forgive the sins of the repentant and to withhold forgiveness from the hardened hearts of the impenitent.

Isn’t that what the church is for? Give God’s peace to terrified hearts. The peace is never from the disciples but was won by and belongs to Jesus. Jesus bestows peace through apostolic ministry by forgiving repentant sinners. Everything the church does, from meetings to singing, even the reason for maintaining the garden plots, is all for the forgiveness of sins and the peace that passes all understanding. Hospital visits and calling on inactive members has the same purpose, to bring forgiveness to people in their trials.

Jesus is where His church meets. But there was one disciple who was notably absent from the gathering. Thomas is deliberately and conspicuously missing. Out of grief or fear to move on with his life, he neglected the meeting together of brothers. His missing church came at a great cost. It caused him to be an unbeliever.

He does not believe the brothers when they said the Lord is alive. Thomas shows his arrogance by concluding they are delusional for thinking that Jesus is risen from the dead. In this way Thomas speaks for many today outside the church who deny the miraculous resurrection of Jesus but he also sounds like those in the church who make demands of God. “I will never believe unless I see and feel the marks of the nails.” Have you ever threatened God to stop believing in Him as long as He did not listen to you and meet your demands?

For us to tempt God is outrageous. If we use words like “Never” or “always” in our prayers to God, it can only be with the help of God.

Eight days later, Thomas gave in to his brothers and meets with them but the doors are still locked. Why would the other 10 disciples still lock the doors after seeing their Lord alive? They were still not perfect in faith since peace drives out all fear. Perhaps the unbelief of Thomas was rubbing off on them.

Jesus returns for the third time. Peace be with you he says for the third time. He invites Thomas to touch the scars. He rebukes Thomas in the words “Do not disbelieve but believe.” Then Jesus restores Thomas. Thomas responds immediately with a great confession of faith: My Lord and my God.

The word of Jesus converts Thomas not the examination of the scars. Miracles do not convert but only the Gospel wins us over. When the Lord forgives us through his word of forgiveness, our hearts respond in joy, our consciences are cleansed and our hope is fortified.

It changes the way you look at your weakness and your past sins. The Saints of old prefer to be known by their weaknesses rather than victories. King David is most remembered for his confession of sin in Psalm 51 as the church sings his inspired words “Create in me a clean heart O Lord”, although he slew Goliath and had many victories over the Philistines.

So for Thomas, his unbelief and doubt no longer are an embarrassment but a witness to the Lord’s desire to have him back in church and to live in the peace of God’s forgiveness. This is no reason to sin on purpose to look for more grace. Is there any good reason to stay away from church?

It will be great when we can meet again to receive God’s peace, to sing and to receive Holy Communion. Until then, the joy of our Lord’s resurrection and his word of peace, is enough and far more than we deserve.

Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed! Hallelujah