

INI-SDG

In the Name of Jesus – To God Alone the Glory

4.19.2009 Quasimodogeniti – St. Stephen Lutheran (West Bay) Mountain View, CA

Dear pilgrim partners. Has Easter come and gone? Or, are we still dwelling upon the fact that Christ, our Savior, has indeed swallowed up death in victory? I pray we are. In fact, the church year calendar that we celebrate here at St. Stephen, would have us celebrate this joyful event up to six Sundays. We do celebrate the 40 days our risen Savior appeared to His disciples... to assure them He had arisen, and continue to teach them what they must now do in His place. Our text for this morning ties in so many of the thoughts from last week as we also receive continued Education from our Lord and what He entrusts to you and me, His disciples. As a believer and follower of Christ, what a joyful thing it is to say that I am a disciple of Christ!

NAS John 20:19-23 When therefore it was evening, on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst, and said to them, "Peace be with you." 20 And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples therefore rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus therefore said to them again, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you." 22 And 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, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained."

This is the Word of God for our instruction and edification. And so we pray this morning for our short study... Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in Your sight oh Lord, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Last week, God's Word reminded us that in life or death, or in speaking with people about our Lord and Savior, THERE IS NO REASON TO FEAR. One of the first things we notice in our verses for this morning is that the disciples seemed to be having some difficulty with that truth. **19 When therefore it was evening, on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews.** I must ask myself when I read this, "Would I have acted any different?" Jesus' disciples had just 3 days earlier come to grips with the fact that their Master and Teacher had been tortured, marched up to Calvary, nailed to a cross, and lifted up for all to mock and sneer at. The disciples knew that Jesus was innocent. So what was to stop the Jews from doing the same thing to His followers! So the disciples were in fearful hiding. They were gathered together behind locked doors. But the image shouldn't surprise us since it had been prophesied that this would happen. In the Old Testament book of Zechariah (which we're currently studying in our Tuesday morning Bible class) Jesus Himself quotes to predict what would happen on Maundy Thursday, the night He was betrayed. *Then Jesus said to them, "All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: 'I will strike the Shepherd, And the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'* (Matt 26:31)

Yes, I don't think I'd be acting any different than the disciples. But how can I be so humble? Sadly, it's not a matter of humility, but reality. I have personally failed in so many situations to echo the voice of the apostle Paul who boldly spoke *I am NOT ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto Salvation... (Romans 1:16)* Even when I have been told and reminded again and again from the LORD, *"Do not be afraid of their faces, For I am with you to deliver you," says the LORD. (Jer. 1:8)* Or when He tells me, *Be still and know that I am God...* we know *the LORD of hosts is with us. (Ps. 46:10-11)* How can't we think of Jesus rising up from peaceful rest in the back of the boat when He and His disciples were on the turbulent sea. There too, He calmed all their fears by telling the winds and the waves... *Peace, be still.* So is there really, NO REASON TO FEAR? Every step leading to the cross, which Jesus took for our sins, were steps deeper and deeper into HIS humiliation for us. Here we had God Himself being subjected to the cruelty and punishment that you and I deserved! But the turning point was yet to come.

In Jesus resurrection from the dead we celebrated this past Sunday, the fact that every step He took from the tomb... is a result of His glorification. We see evidence of this in that He no longer allowed Himself to be bound by His human body. Even behind locked doors, Jesus appeared in person and stood before them as in our verses. The word, "surprised," might not fully describe the disciples' reaction. They had heard the reports of the women, but how much could they truly believe? Jesus tells His fearful disciples **"Peace be with you."** In order to give them even more certainty He allows them to touch Him. He was no ghost. **20 He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples therefore rejoiced when they saw the Lord.** Even doubting Thomas as we read earlier believed after he had put his hand and fingers into Jesus' hands and side. Jesus' disciples, including you and me, certainly have great reason to rejoice... in our risen Savior. We see in our verses Christ being the key that took His disciples from Fear, to Peace, to Overjoyed!

The Lord gives true peace. Thank God, that this is not the kind of peace the world hungers after! Christ did not come to promise peace from wars, peace from financial burdens, peace from physical suffering, peace from religious tolerance, or peace of mind from our troubled economy... those are the types of peace that come and go. We start, Lord willing, our Comparative Religion studies after the worship service this morning. And we will see how EVERY other religion but Christianity (and even some so called Christians), think they find peace NOT in Christ, but a false peace in themselves. We hear such say, "I think I'm a good person. If there's a heaven, I'm sure I'll be going there. I'm not like other people." But when Christ utters from HIS lips the word of peace, there is a whole other level of peace that has no comparison.

For example: It is very important to me that our members and our guests that walk in the doors here at St. Stephen, understands, that every part of our worship service... has a purpose. In a nutshell, the purpose is to ultimately give you Peace in Christ that the vast majority of this world does not have! In the Worship Supplement this morning, we have been following our order of service that had us make confession and hear the absolution of our sins. Why? What *is* confession? Luther's catechism rightly defines:

Confession has two parts. One, that we confess our sins. The other, that we receive absolution of forgiveness from the pastor as from God himself, not doubting but firmly believing that our sins are thus forgiven before God in heaven.

Confession does give forgiveness. Christ does. But then we might ask, which sins should we confess?

Before God we should plead guilty of all sins, even those we are not aware of, as we do in the Lord's Prayer.

But the denying question in our day is... How do we recognize what sin is? Luther rightfully continues:

Consider your place in life according to the Ten Commandments. Are you a father, mother, son, daughter, employer, or employee? Have you been disobedient, unfaithful, or lazy? Have you hurt anyone by word or deed? Have you been dishonest, careless, wasteful, or done other wrong?

You see, in placing our lives in examination of God's righteous law, then we not only recognize our uncountable sins, but we thirst for peace in Christ's forgiveness. Which is why our theme for this morning is in fact that: **Christ is the Key to True Peace.**

What are keys good for? My set of keys here aren't that impressive. Unless you are looking for keys to a 95' Mercury Villager, the parsonage, or the church here (which are unlocked most the time anyway)? Keys of course... lock and unlock things. That's an obvious truth. So when we speak about our Savior and say that **Christ is the Key to True Peace**, then we are talking about much more than an old set of keys. Jesus Christ is the key to heaven. This nowadays is not such an obvious truth. This truth is very often obscured by political and social agendas. Sitting here this morning to hear about this peace we have in Christ is not only needful and necessary, but it is a privilege. Being able to speak to you this morning about our Peace in Christ is my humble privilege as well. It may sound strange to some when the pastor pronounces the absolution on Sunday morning. A casual observer might ask, "What gives *him* the right to forgive sins? Only God can do that!" It's true the Lord Jesus alone has earned the forgiveness which each of us needs. But Christ gives a unique authority to His believers when He gave them the power to proclaim God's forgiveness, or lack of it, in God's name. We call this power "the Ministry of the Keys." But what is the use of the keys? Luther's catechism again says:

The use of the keys is that special power and right which Christ gave to His church on earth: to forgive the sins of penitent sinners but refuse forgiveness to the impenitent as long as they do not repent.

Where does Luther get that from? **21 Jesus therefore said to (His disciples) again, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you." 22 And 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, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained."**

There are many examples of this truth in the New Testament, as you can see in 1 Corinthians 5. The believers there in Corinth were to carry out their assignment to "retain" (that is to bind, lock, not forgive) the terrible sin in which one of their members was living in unrepentance. According to verse 4 in that chapter they were to carry this out ***In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ...*** Jesus said similarly to His disciples in Matthew chapter 18 that, ***whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.*** Christians are called by God to administer the keys as they were given to us by Jesus Christ – to forgive or retain sins in the name of our Savior, and to speak to others about the true peace we have in Christ alone. What *is* more loving? To warn someone about to fall into a pit or to warn someone that their unrepentant sin will make them fall into the eternal pit of hell. This is the loving reason why Jesus gives us the use of the keys. It is tough love. This is why; **Christ is the Key to True Peace.**

Jesus similarly breathes on us this morning as He did with His disciples in our verses. He does so by giving us the Holy Spirit through the Word of God we have heard here. Through His Word, He chooses, calls, and makes us His disciples for His own special purpose. As 1 Peter reminds us, ***9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.*** It is His obtained mercy that we visibly see in our Savior's pierced hands and side... by faith; and faith alone!

Each Sunday we make confession of our sins and plead for God's mercy. And the recognition of our sins continues to make us more and more thirsty, for Christ's mercy. We come into God's house to hear how we were created to love and serve Him as His own dear children. And every part of our service is designed to hear these truths. That God, our heavenly Father, HAS forgiven all your sins. By the perfect life and innocent death of our Lord Jesus Christ, He has removed your guilt forever. You are His own dear child! May God give you strength to live according to His will... because **Christ is the Key to True Peace. Amen.**

It is this peace of the one and only true God that passes all understanding that will guard and keep your hearts and minds in our risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.