

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.' <sup>20</sup>After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup>Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' <sup>22</sup>When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup>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. <sup>25</sup>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.' <sup>27</sup>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.' <sup>28</sup>Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' <sup>29</sup>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. <sup>31</sup>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.

Our Gospel lesson this morning describes what happened on the first Easter Sunday evening and then describes a scene a week later when Thomas was present with the other disciples. To help us understand the scene imagine if you will that we are on lock down not because of COvid but because of the authorities.

On January 6 we feared for our lives as we lived through an attack on the capitol and the following week I remember relating the story of how the one morning just after the attack it sounded like a tank was driving from the chapel to the manse. It was a tank, but a propane tanker to fill the tank behind the manse. There was a moment of fear and trembling.

Imagine if you will we are on lockdown because our leader and dear friend, the one we have followed for 3 years and confessed as the Messiah, our teacher and Savior, has been executed by order of the empire. We are terrified that the authorities will come looking for us next. So we are keeping a low profile behind locked doors until the situation calms down. Mary, one of our members, returned from the burial site early this morning and said

the strangest thing, "I have seen the Lord" and he gave me this message for you, "I am ascending to my Father and your father, to my God and your God".

We really don't know what to make of her story, maybe Mary had seen a ghost or an apparition. Peter and John had raced to check out the tomb but they found only an empty tomb with the used burial cloths lying there, but no body. Had Jesus been spirited away?" What do we do now?

The Gospel of John doesn't waste any time telling us what to do. This passage in John is sometimes called John's Pentecost. John celebrates the giving on the Spirit on the evening of Easter Sunday.

Before the sun set on Resurrection day, Jesus appeared to his disciples and gave them three gifts:

The first is peace. Jesus greets his disciples with the words, "Peace be with you". A common greeting of the day. Then he shows them his wounds. When Jesus repeated the greeting to his disciples, they recognized this to be the peace of Christ that Jesus had promised them before the crucifixion in John 14. "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you". The Risen Christ brings them deep peace, deeper peace than a mere greeting. Christ's peace surpasses all understanding. It is a lasting peace from the one who from birth was hailed as the Prince of Peace. The anxious and fearful disciples were overcome with joy to see the Risen Lord standing in their midst. Jesus had returned to them not seeking revenge, but bringing peace. Peace be to you. We were overcome by joy to be in each other's presence last Thursday knowing Christ was in our midst and our mission was to feed the hungry.

The peace the world gives is taken away all too easily. Since the birth of Christ over 8,000 treaties of peace have been made. Each peace treaty was meant to remain in force forever! The average time for peace treaties - two years!

Sadly lock-downs have been all too frequent in schools, places of worship, hotels, music venues and even our own homes, when there is an active shooter on the loose. After a year of pandemic restrictions we're seeing a surge in mass shootings. Fear and fragmentation of our communities which were there pre-Covid have now been made worse.

After sharing God's peace with his disciples, Jesus commissions them to continue the work God sent him to do. "As the Father has sent me, so I send you". Jesus, the incarnation of God's love for us must ascend/return to his Father. The church celebrates the Ascension 40 days after Easter. God's mission must continue and this mission must be continued through Christ's followers. This is Christ's second gift to the disciples, a purpose, a mission to the ones God has called and chosen. The call has now come to us to carry on Christ's ministry. From a handful of followers at the time of the crucifixion to billions of followers around the world today!

As followers of Christ we have a mission, a purpose. The members of this chapel have crafted their own mission statement to remind us of "bringing God's inclusive, affirming, welcoming love to all as we work for justice and peace". Our top mark in the

survey we took last year was *caring relationships*: our love and care for one another and desire to reach out to the community and loving our neighbor which we do in many ways other than food bank help, the school lunch program and global mission through One Great Hour of Sharing. Our mission is always to reveal God in Jesus Christ. We call it our mission but it is our mission in Christ; in Christ's ministry. We follow the will of Christ.

When the first disciples received their commission, I'm sure they wondered how on earth they were ever going to accomplish sharing the good news to the ends of the world. Just unlocking the doors and moving from the safety of that room into a hostile world was daunting enough. How did they do it?

They had help! The third gift Jesus gave was the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus breathed on them and said to them "Receive the Holy Spirit". They became alive in Christ. Again a fulfillment of an earlier promise when he said, "I will ask the Father and he will give you another Advocate to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees the Spirit, nor knows the Spirit."

Just because we don't see something doesn't mean it doesn't or didn't exist. I have a friend who just moved to a different state. When her walking buddy calls, she drops everything to go walking with her. Her walking buddy can point out everything to her. Now she's learning the flora and fauna of her area because as they walk along her walking buddy stops to point out and name the plants. Plants my friend didn't know existed before.

Sometimes the object has to be pointed out to us. Like the disciple Thomas we need assurance. Thomas was not with the disciples on Easter Sunday evening when the Risen Jesus appeared. He wanted to be on his own to deal with his grief. Like the others he was broken-hearted. This is the very time we need Christian fellowship when we're hurting and grieving. By cutting himself off from the group he missed Christ's first visit.

When Thomas returned to the hide-out, the other disciples gave him the same news Mary had announced to them, "We have seen the Lord".

Seeing is believing for Thomas, "Unless I can put my finger in the mark of the nails, I will not believe". These are the conditions for faith that Thomas demanded. A week later those conditions are met and the risen Jesus presents himself to Thomas. This time the doors are shut and not locked. Again Jesus greeted them with, "Peace be with you" and offered his wounds to Thomas is a very dramatic scene. The Greek words voiced by Jesus here are literally translated as "do not be unbelieving, but believing". Thomas was overcome by the grace, love and presence of the Risen Christ. Thomas makes his confession, "My Lord and my God." When we experience grace with such an overwhelming sense of God's power we fall to our knees in confession, thanksgiving or awesome praise.

Thomas asked and received the gift of faith using doubt as his slow, deliberate way of making sure. He doubted his doubts! Jesus moved him from unbelief to belief. Then Thomas was sure and all in and the story goes he went off to India to serve.

Today in the power of the Spirit, blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe. Instead of the eyes of sight to believe we have eyes of faith.

The gifts Christ gives on this Second Sunday of Easter are God's peace that comes from knowing God through Jesus Christ. We don't have to know all the man-made doctrines about Christ, and answer all the theological questions that still puzzle us. The mystery of faith is that Christ died, Christ rose and Christ will come again. Like Thomas once we are sure, we'll know it and be convicted by the Holy Spirit. Our guide, helper, comforter who intercedes for us when we don't know how to pray or what to say is with us always. You who have the Spirit have power and authority in Christ to bring the message of Christ, speak for Christ, and be the hands, feet and heart of Christ. You are a testament to how the Holy Spirit is working in us. I call it the Now testament.

The gifts of the Risen Jesus that John describes are peace in Christ, a purpose, a commission in life that is other-centered not self-centered and we too are sent out in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.