

Sermon April 19<sup>th</sup>

May the words from my lips and the meditations of our hearts always be pleasing to you O God.

Traditionally this Sunday – the second Sunday of Easter is known as “low Sunday”. Perhaps because there is low attendance after the “high” of Easter Sunday. It is also the Sunday where we hear the story of Thomas – frequently referred to as “doubting Thomas”. Thomas has had a tough time over the years. The moniker of “doubting” really does not seem fair. After all Thomas is only asking for what all the others had – a chance to experience the risen Christ. The disciples did not immediately believe the witness of the women - they wanted to see for themselves - just as Thomas did. Thomas is not a villain. Thomas is a hurting and hopeful disciple. Just like us. Thomas is wounded. It is less disbelief and more lament. There is despair in his words. Just like us.

Our Gospel reading from John shows us a group of frightened believers. We are given 2 stories of experiencing the risen Christ.

The disciples are gathered together behind a locked door. They were frightened because of what had happened to Jesus. They probably feared for their own lives. This fear was augmented with deep sorrow as they grieved the loss of Jesus. And added to that they must have wondered what next? Where were they

supposed to go? What were they supposed to do? What now?  
So they stayed together in a room behind a locked door.

But a locked door cannot keep Jesus out. Jesus came to them  
in their fear and in their need. Nothing can keep Jesus away.

Perhaps this year more than any we may be able to identify  
deeply with the disciples together in a room – not going out –  
behind a closed and locked door.

This year we find ourselves in the same spot. We are not out  
rejoicing. We are not out celebrating. We are inside. And like  
the disciples we are fearful.

Jesus was the one who said to the early disciples – come and  
see and invited us to do so as well. Then later Jesus was the  
one who said to the women at the tomb – go and tell and we  
are invited to do so as well. And now Jesus comes to the  
disciples in their fear and uncertainty and behind a closed door  
and says come and touch and believe. And we are invited to do  
this as well.

These were dark days for the followers of Jesus and many  
would lose much - some even their lives because of their belief  
in the risen Lord.

But Jesus did not want them to fear – he comes to them and  
says “peace be with you” ...not only once! He says this to them  
3 times. This is part of the commissioning. Jesus brings them  
the peace the world cannot give. Jesus brings them hope.  
Jesus brings them reassurance and Jesus brings them their task.

The disciples are called to do more than they are capable of on their own. Jesus breathes on them and reminds them that the work of the kingdom is not done – it will be up to them to continue the work. Just as it is for us. Jesus is not only commissioning a few close friends and believers – this is a commissioning of the whole Church for all time.

The Gospel of John is the one that emphasizes the unity among the disciples the most. And with the second visit from Jesus the disciples are unified once more in their belief and their faith. Jesus is not critical of Thomas – but I wonder what the other disciples thought! And Thomas is the one who demonstrates belief so clearly – more clearly than anyone else in our Gospels when he cries out – my Lord and my God!

Jesus appears to the frightened disciples – hiding behind a locked door to give them a benediction – a commission and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Over the generations we have taken the witness of the women at the tomb, the description of the appearances of the risen Christ and we have taken up the task of discipleship. Following the words and the teachings of Jesus – working for the Kingdom of God.

The fear of the disciples turns to hope when Jesus comes to them. Can our fear turn to hope when we know that Jesus comes to us through all barriers? Jesus comes to us where we are and when we are in need. Jesus comes into our lives and our hearts.

Jesus enters through locked doors that try to protect broken lives. Jesus' presence in a hurting and broken world. We need that presence. We feel that presence and we experience that presence when we participate in communion. This is why the sacrament of the Lord's supper is so important to Lutherans. We know Jesus in the breaking of the bread.

Jesus came to the disciples in that locked room to give them hope and to take away their fear. His words – peace be with you. These words we say to one another – they are words of deep reassurance and love and support and strength.

The disciples knew that Jesus was with them – that they were not alone and that they could go on and do the work entrusted to them. Just as we do - just as we can.

When we are sent, Jesus goes with us. Jesus sends us into the broken lives of others. Jesus is present through our broken and hopeful words.

You are not alone.

Tell me your story.

I believe you.

I will walk with you.

Peace be with you....the peace that comes from the knowledge that in spite of all the hurt and harm that the world can cause God' love and compassion are very real things in our lives.

Jesus still has the power to give us what we need. Peace be with you. Do not be afraid.

AMEN