

“Peace be with you”

O sons and daughters of the King,
Whom heav'nly hosts in glory sing,
Today the grave has lost its sting! Alleluia!

On the evening of that first day of the week – the disciples were not in a singing mood. Instead of alleluias, there were hushed whispers. “Shh, be quiet, or someone will hear you!” Locked behind doors for fear of the Jews – afraid of being found out, arrested, crucified – just like Jesus. “Make sure that door’s locked and be quiet.”

Already Jesus had been raised from the tomb – “He is not here, He is risen.” The report from the tomb had been confirmed. The women had seen Jesus – alive – and reported His resurrection to the disciples yet, there was no singing, no alleluias.

Jesus IS risen. “It is finished.” All sin has been redeemed in the blood of the Lamb. Sin and death and the grave have been smashed. All of this is true – but the disciples, these followers of Jesus – are living in fear. “Shh! Be quiet. Check that door again.”

In the beginning of this Gospel St. John speaks of Jesus as “the Word who became flesh and made His dwelling among us” – as, “the Light shining in the darkness.” Into the dark despair of that room, Jesus comes in the flesh to His disciples locked in fear and says – “Peace be with you.”

He lays His hands before them to see the holes from the nails – and His side with the gash from the spear. There’s no doubt about it – this is the very same Jesus who was crucified, who died, who was buried. But He’s no longer dead! He’s alive! And finally, the disciples rejoice in seeing Him.

Now think about it – nothing had really changed. Jesus was alive – just as He has foretold, and just as the women had reported to them earlier. Jesus was no more alive in that room than He had been an hour before.

The only difference was that what their ears had heard – their eyes could now see. And what a difference that makes – their fear turned to joy. That’s what the resurrected Jesus comes to bring – peace and joy.

When you think about it, these disciples had ever reason to be afraid of this Jesus who shows up in the midst of them. After all, this is the one with whom they failed to watch and pray – the one who was betrayed by one and denied by another – the one they'd all boastfully said they would never abandon, but did.

You want to talk about judgment day – getting what they deserved – this was it. But vengeance is the furthest thing from His mind. To these men who are dead in their trespasses and sins – bound in darkness and fear – Jesus comes and breathes into them the breath of life.

“Peace be with you” – in other words – I forgive you all your sin. There is nothing to fear. By my death in your place, I have reconciled you to God. My resurrection shows that all your sin which I bore in my body – has been paid in full. “Peace be with you.”

Now the disciple Thomas was not with the others on the first Easter evening. He had not seen Jesus alive – with nail holes and gashed side. He had missed out on the wonderful truth of the resurrected Christ and His peace.

Of course, nothing had really changed over the course of that week, either. God's Word and promises were still true – the OT and Jesus Himself had foretold His resurrection. The “it is finished” of Good Friday still remains. All sin is paid for – and the proof is that Jesus is no longer dead but alive!

And yet, Thomas remains in the darkness, locked away in fear and unbelief. Like us who are gathered here today – our default position is – “I'll believe it when I see it.”

But does seeing make it true? Of course not. None of us were there when the Lord created the heavens and the earth out of nothing – simply by the power of His Word – but He did. It is true. Not one of us was there when Jesus said “It is finished” – but it's true. Jesus was crucified, He died, was buried – and raised to life again on the third day --- whether there are any witnesses, or not.

Our seeing and believing doesn't make something true – God does. We may want to “see” in order to “believe” – but Jesus says – “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.”

Blessed are you – O sons and daughters of the King – for you have not seen, yet have believed. The Lord Jesus speaks His Word to you – breathing out the Holy Spirit – to create a faith that trusts His Word, even without sight.

Faith does not come from Thomas, or the disciples, or us finally having enough proof or information so that now we can believe – faith comes from the Holy Spirit who works through the Word of God. That is why we drink the pure spiritual milk of God’s Word – so that by the Holy Spirit – we may grow up to salvation.

Blessed are you who hear and believe. Blessed are you who believe that the word of absolution that I speak is not my own – but the word of Christ who sent me. Blessed are you who hear and believe Christ who gives you His Body and Blood and promises – its for you, for the forgiveness of all your sins – even though your eye sees only bread and wine, and your guilty conscience says “I’m not worthy.”

Blessed are you – who believes Christ when He says “I will be with you always, even unto the end of the age” – who believe that Christ comes into this room where we are gathered – so that you may hear His Easter Gospel --- “Peace be with you.”

Blessed are you – O sons and daughters of the King, Whom heav’nly host in glory sing. Today the grave has lost its sting! Alleluia.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.