

See His Cross! Easter Sunday Peace and Life Are Yours! Text: John 20:19,20

Jesus is risen! We have changed the somber mood of Lent for the joy of Easter. We see it in our worship today. Easter lilies are on the altar, and brilliant white replaces penitential purple of Lent. We sense it also in our hymns. We sing joyful and powerful hymns instead of the sorrowful notes of Lent. Jesus lives, we proclaim. Yet the cross is still before us today. We have an empty cross in the sanctuary. It is empty because Jesus is finished with suffering for our sins and because Jesus is alive. He has risen. That is joyful news for us and for all the world. Jesus lives. Because Jesus lives, everything has changed and we look at the cross in a different light. We find comfort, joy, peace, and hope in his cross. "I know that my redeemer lives," we sing. "What comfort this sweet sentence gives!" Today we see his cross, but we see peace and life there.

The disciples on the evening of that first Easter did not know Easter joy or peace. They had seen Jesus crucified. With his death, they assumed all their hopes and expectations had also died. When Jesus was first arrested in the garden, they had fled into the night, confused and frightened. As the events unfolded, they watched in shock. Peter, who had boasted so quickly that he would die with Jesus rather than deny him, had in fact denied Jesus, not once, not twice, but three times. Peter and the rest saw the One they spent three years with abused by the soldiers and then led out of Jerusalem, too weak to carry his own cross.

It's no wonder that they were afraid. First, they were afraid that all they had believed about Jesus was a lie. They had confessed Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of the living God. They had signed on to Peter's confession and agreed. They had been there when the crowds shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" What excitement they must have felt! But they also heard the crowd rant, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" What did all this mean for the promises he had made to Mary and Martha when their brother Lazarus died? Then Jesus had said, "I am the resurrection and the life" (Jn 11:25). But he was dead. Were those just empty words and vain hope in the face of the death of a dear friend?

Second, they were also afraid that Jesus could not care for them any longer. If the Jewish leaders had killed Jesus, his disciples were next, they thought. Jesus had protected them even in the garden. When they were all surrounded by the mob, Jesus asked the mob to let his disciples go if all they wanted was him. Now he could not protect them by his words or even by his power. Jesus was gone, and the miracles they had witnessed were also past and gone. Could Jesus still exercise such power to protect them? They were afraid that he did not have the power to protect them from the Jewish leaders, so they were behind locked doors. They were also afraid of the future. What would happen to them? They had left businesses and families behind to follow Jesus, only to see the reason they had gone brutally killed.

Of course, they had heard the reports of his resurrection. The angels had appeared to the women. But the disciples did not believe the women. Even when some of the women said that they had seen Jesus, the disciples dismissed their reports as hysterical hallucinations. When Peter and John went to the tomb that morning, John believed, but fear still was stronger than comfort and hope for Peter and the others. They were confused about what it all meant. Even though they had seen Lazarus come out of his grave, witnessed the youth of Nain sit up as his body was carried toward burial, and heard how the daughter of Jairus had returned to life; the resurrection of Jesus was just too much to believe.

Then Jesus suddenly stood among them. In spite of the locked doors, he was there with them. Jesus left no doubt about who he was. He showed them his hands and side. They saw and touched the wounds Jesus had suffered only three days earlier. But he was alive. Jesus encouraged them to see the cross differently than they had on Good Friday.

Jesus brought peace to them in that locked room. His presence among them was a confirmation that all he had taught them was true. When he had told Mary and Martha that he was the resurrection and the life, it wasn't just words to make them feel better. Those words were absolutely true! He was the Anointed One, the Christ whom they had come to trust. His message was true and reliable. And he had the power to care for them. They need not fear. He was not dead. His power had not been removed. In fact, it was even greater because he himself had arisen from the dead—something that no one has ever done or would ever do again.

The peace he brought was tied to the wounds he had received on the cross. He had suffered for the disciples. He paid for their sins with his suffering and death. He accomplished forgiveness for them and all the world. They were at peace with God because of those wounds. As their hesitant fingers traced the wounds of the nails in his hands, they began to understand that the punishment Jesus had endured brought peace. His suffering was now over. His hands, side, and feet were no longer attached to the cross. He was no longer suffering. It was done, finished, over. "Peace be with you!" he said.

That peace is yours too. His wounds were not just for this select group of people in Palestine long ago. His wounds announce to all that he has completed his mission. We have forgiveness—full and free. Because of what Jesus suffered, once and for all, as the writer to the Hebrews announces, we are declared innocent of sin—justified before God. We have peace with God, the peace promised by the angels at Jesus' birth and now fully assured by the living hands of Jesus, still marked by the suffering he endured to achieve that peace. "Peace be with you!"

Since Jesus was now alive, he could also protect his disciples. Not only were his words true and his mission successfully completed, but Jesus also was there to assure them that he would continue to be with them no matter what the future held.

How many centuries have passed since that Sunday evening encounter with Jesus? Jesus is alive. He has cared for his sheep through those centuries, and he continues to care for them. We are included in his powerful and gentle care. No matter what lies ahead for any of us, Jesus will take care of us. That too brings us peace, comfort, and courage. See his cross. His wounds assure us of so much. We can also see the cross in a little different light. Yes, it was a place of torture, but that's all over. Jesus lives.

His wounds brought another blessing for his fearful disciples. Of course, death was a part of their fear. They had come to Jerusalem with Jesus imagining the worst. Thomas had said, "Let us also go, that we may die with him" (Jn 11:16). When they thought Jesus was dead for good, perhaps they became resigned to their fate—to die like Jesus. They had no hope. The Jewish leaders who it appeared were intent on killing Jesus, obliterating his teachings, would therefore attack the disciples of Jesus too. Even if they escaped the wrath of the Jewish leaders at this point, what hope would they have when death finally caught up to them? Joy and hope were in short supply in that locked room before Jesus came.

But he did come to them! If they imagined that he was only a phantom or an illusion created by their own wishful thinking, Jesus dispelled that thought. He not only asked them to touch his wounds, he also ate some food that first night with them. Just as they had begun to see the cross in the light of the payment for their sins completed, Jesus asked them to see the cross in the light of everlasting life.

His body was the same as it had been at the crucifixion. The wounds were still there. But it was also different. It was glorified. He appeared among them without knocking on the door and waiting for them to open it. He was just there! No one had unlocked the door. Jesus invited them to see his cross and then life and death itself in a different way. Jesus had said, "Because I live you too will live." Just as he died but then rose again, so would his disciples. Jesus had been dead, but now he was alive. That is what would happen to them too. It was as Jesus had said early in his ministry: "Whoever believes [will] have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). What comfort and peace they had because he was alive! They could face all of life's challenges, knowing they would live forever. They would be brought back to life with glorified bodies like his and live with him forever in the mansions he prepared for them.

That comfort and peace are yours too. The cross is empty. Jesus endured the pain, suffering, and death, but he did not stay dead. He is the same Jesus who paid the debt your sins deserved. Look at his hands. They move. Look at his feet. He stands among the disciples and walks among them. His hands and feet are not still, quiet, and lifeless. They belong to a risen and glorified Lord. You too will live.

The women had helped with the burial of Jesus. Then his hands had been still and lifeless. But no longer. There will come a time for all of us when our bodies lie still and lifeless in a casket and later in a grave. As Jesus moved among the disciples and they touched his living hands, they found the hope of their own resurrection and eternal life. We find it too. Our hands may be still in death, but they will move again. Jesus will call you and me out of our graves. Then our hands will move again. Jesus will call us from our graves and give us glorified bodies like his.

That hope is based on the living Lord. This Easter hope gives us the courage to face each challenge, each tragedy, and each misery of life. We know we will rise from the dead as he did. Only he has the power to offer such hope. When we face the loss of a beloved believer—a child, a spouse, a parent—we turn to the promises of Jesus for comfort. We need not be afraid as the disciples were before Jesus appeared. He lives! He overcame death! Our sins are forgiven. Peace be with you! Amen.