

**SERMON - John 20:19-31**  
**“He Lives To Silence All My Fears”**  
**Messiah Lutheran Church**  
**Sunday, April 11, 2021**

Isn't it something - often, all it takes is one item. And once you have it, you have full and total peace.

All ages know what this is like. Let's start from the cradle and work our way up. I won't ask for a show of hands, but when you were little (or if you're little right now) - you couldn't go to bed without a special stuffed animal because it gave you calm despite the pitch black room and the monsters in the closet. That precious toy you had as a child (whatever it was) went with you everywhere and always lit your face up with joy. To go in a different direction, if you've long lived with a serious allergy, maybe the EpiPen is the item that gives you full and total peace. Better safe to have it near you than sorry you forgot to pack it. You never know when you might need it. Same goes for life jackets, bear spray if you're out hiking in the backcountry, jumper cables or a tire repair kit in your car. Just having things like these close gives you peace of mind. As you age - maybe that "peace of mind" item takes the form of a bracelet around your wrist for some. My grandma once had one of these LifeAlert bracelets - she lived alone and in case of emergency she could press a button on her wrist and it would call 911 to assist her. Maybe for some, peace takes the form of an emotional support animal. Those are becoming more popular. Maybe for other, peace takes the form of a person. Whenever mom or dad or sister or spouse or BFF is near, nothing to fear.

I think all of us get peace of mind at night by locking our doors, too. It gives us safety and security when we're sleeping or away. And that's where we find the disciples in this scene - behind locked doors. How did you spend your Easter evening last week? Maybe with loved ones. Maybe satisfied and content after morning worship, a nice meal, time with loved ones. Whatever you did, I'm sure you had a better Easter evening than these disciples. They were gathered not in celebration, but the total opposite. Fear. Even though Jesus had told them in the past that he would rise to life on the third day...and it was the third day - fear dominates them. They were afraid of those Jewish leaders who had their Teacher and Master killed on Friday morning. If they catch wind that his closest followers are still at large, then they might meet a terrible fate, too. There's only one thing, one person that could truly bring them peace on that first Easter evening. Jesus. Does Jesus bring peace or is Jesus himself peace? The answer is yes, both. The perfect love of Jesus drives away fear.

**So on the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said...**i'm gonna leave it a cliffhanger for a moment. You heard the reading earlier, so you know what's coming next, but just think for a moment. Jesus's first speaking opportunity to his disciples after the resurrection. Addressing a room of men who deserted and abandoned him a few days earlier. Who, save for one (John), were absent from the foot of the cross as Jesus died. If the first words were "seriously, guys?" - we'd totally understand. But what does he say -

one of the best and most beautiful words that exist: **Jesus came and stood among them and said peace.** And to put their restless hearts to rest even further, Jesus doesn't just tell them words of peace, but shows them assurance as well. The holes from where the nails were. The space from where the spear pierced his side. Visible here for all to see. And then to put their restless hearts to rest even further, he doubles down on the greeting he gave them moments earlier. **Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you!** Words so nice, let's say them twice. And then to put their restless hearts to rest even further, he gives them the keys to the greatest kingdom of all - the kingdom of heaven. The ability to forgive sinners. He doesn't punish them for their actions over the past days. He blesses them to continue in this calling as his disciples. **He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."** Words of peace twice, see your Savior standing before you, bring the peace of forgiveness to others. Turns out, they could now have a calm and relaxed Easter evening just like we did. Perfect love drives out fear. We all have that one thing or one person that puts our hearts at ease, that gives us peace, that keeps fear at bay. For them, it was Christ.

Maybe sometimes when we read Bible stories from the gospels we go hard on the 12 disciples. Why did they fall asleep in the garden like that? Why did they abandon their Savior on Holy Weekend like that? Why are they so afraid here! Why did Peter say that or do that! Silly foolish disciples! Why does Thomas doubt?! Bad Thomas. I wonder if we sometimes go hard on them because we have the benefit of hindsight. We have the whole story laid out for us in the Word - they were living it in real time. I wonder if we go too hard on them sometimes. Honestly, they were real people with real fears. They feared for their lives, so they ran. They feared for their lives, so they hid. Maybe we should go a little easy on them. Because we too, have our fears. We too, have doubts. Are we afraid that by being a follower of Jesus, our lives are on the line? Probably not. Do we doubt that Jesus rose from the dead? That's also unlikely to me. We gather here week in and week out because we have faith and trust that Jesus lives.

Our fear and doubt might look different than theirs, but it's still fear and doubt. When rain clouds descend upon our world (i.e, pandemics), even the strongest faiths among us have wrestled with some fear over the course of the last 13 months. Maybe you are afraid of contracting illness. Maybe you have fears not for yourself, but for the physical or mental health of someone you love. Maybe you're totally fearless right now in the eye of this storm, but the future fills you with a bit of worry. "Will life ever go back to normal again? Will our church ever go back to normal? Will there be long-term aftermath of this whole ordeal that will continue to haunt our world for years to come?" On a more personal level, countless fears abound as well. And these kinds of fears are timeless. Will I get better? Will I have enough for tomorrow? Will I ever find someone? Will I get through this? What will tomorrow look like? And again, even if you don't have fear for yourself on any of these matters, then swap out the pronouns. Maybe you're worried about the spiritual, mental, physical or emotional welfare of someone near and dear to you. I think it's safe for me to say this - everyone in the room and watching right now can identify something going on in life right now that's keeping them from having perfect peace.

And I didn't even get to talking about spiritual matters yet. Whether you currently are fearful or not, all of us should have a reason to be afraid of God. Countless times we have sinned against him. Countless times we have betrayed him, abandoned him, put him second or far lower in our heart of hearts - below temporary treasures. Do you remember when I did that cliffhanger thing a few minutes ago...Jesus was about to speak to his disciples: **Jesus came and stood among them and said...** If Jesus came and stood among the disciples, he could have unloaded on them. If he stood in the flesh right here among us - the things he could say to us! He could bring all of our most shameful sins to light. He could call us out on our lack of faithfulness. We celebrated last week, Jesus lives, yay! But Hebrews also teaches us that **"It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."** If Jesus stood in the room here of fearful children, and if he opened his mouth to speak...what he could say to all of us.

Well, he'd say the same thing he told the disciples. Peace. And then he'd say it again. Again, peace be yours. I can't say it enough - perfect love drives out fear. And Jesus is perfect love. We come here each week in the Lord's house and each week he silences all our fears with the good news of the gospel. With our greatest reason to fear - our sins, Christ has eliminated that fear by winning victory on the cross. Our sins are paid for and over with, they're done. Whether we're always cognizant of it or not - our greatest problem has been defeated. Spiritually, we have nothing to fear. And when we're here on Sundays, too - we receive words of peace that can soothe us in our relationships with others, guide us through our hardships, and strengthen us as we walk through dark days. Does that mean that everything will become kittens and butterflies when we walk out of these doors? No, not necessarily. But we can walk out of these doors knowing that we have the God of the Universe's in our corner, filling us with love and peace.

Christ brought peace to his disciples and Christ brings us peace, too. Unfortunately, we don't get to encounter in-person Jesus just yet like the disciples did, we'll have to wait on that until God calls us home. But Christ is very real and very present with us in everyday life - and not just on Sundays.

Jesus is present to give us peace in the words of forgiveness that we offer to one another. We call these the Keys to the Kingdom and they were from one of our verses here - I'll read them again. **If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.**" One Sunday a few months ago someone asked me on the way out of church "Why are you (the pastor) able to stand up there and say "I forgive you your sins in the name of the..." this is the reason why right here. John 20:23. God has given his church, us, the ability to forgive sins of others. And what's cool is that you don't need to wait until 10:36am every Sunday to finally hear that, whew, my sins are now forgiven. You don't need to wait for an eight-year trained man of the cloth to remind you of forgiveness. Because our parents and kids and friends and family can assure us of Christ's forgiveness because Christ has given you these keys. You can give others the peace of Christ when you forgive sins. You can receive the peace of Christ when love stops keeping record of wrongs.

We also experience the peace of Christ from the Word we meditate on week in and week out. Last verse of this section explains John the writer's reason for giving us his contribution to the Bible. **Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.** We could do a whole sermon just on this verse. But Christ gives us daily light and peace, fear-silencing hope through these simple pages. Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ. According to this verse - those who believe, those who have faith - can look forward to perfect life that lasts. Peter, in one of his books of the Bible - puts it beautifully, too as he speaks to fellow Christians - **Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy,**

So what do we have in our corner to silence our fears? Christ. Ours forever in heaven, ours now through forgiveness, ours now through the Word - which brings us life (as John said), inexpressible and glorious joy (as Peter said) - and blessing, as Jesus says in that crowded room long ago: **blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."** Amen.