

April 11, 2021, 2nd Sunday of Easter

Text: John 20:19–31

Sermon: “Peace Be With You”

The Lord is resurrected. (He is risen; he is risen, indeed!) That was last Sunday. Now, in this season of resurrection and life, we see what the resurrection means for the Church, for us, and for our children.

The Holy Spirit came on Jesus at his Baptism. From then on, everyone is to know that Jesus is about the business of fulfilling all righteousness. In this fulfilling of all righteousness, every sinner will be justified, declared righteous. As John the Baptist proclaims, Jesus is ***“the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world”*** (John 1:29).

“If you are poor and miserable, then go to Confession and make use of its healing medicine” (BEC 26). This is the gift of Absolution that Jesus institutes in that locked room (among other places too).

Dr. Bernard Nathanson—the famous abortionist, cofounder of NARAL, and abortion propagandist by his own admission—was looking for relief from his guilt, his fear of God’s Holy Law. He came to know that the abortion of babies was evil, and his hands were as bloody as any. For example, he is likely personally responsible for more than 75,000 abortions. Where could he go? He went to the Roman Catholic Church. Why? He is reported to have said that it was because they were the ones who provided so many ways of being forgiven and provided a man who could speak the Lord’s forgiveness to you directly—Confession and Absolution. (We may lament that he did not come across the Lutheran Church, where he would have found Absolution untainted by the works-righteousness of purgatory, and so on, but that discussion may be left for another time.)

The blessing and gift to Dr. Bernard Nathanson and to every sinner is that everything in the Church is ordered toward the forgiveness of sins.

“As the Father has sent me,” Jesus said, “even so I am sending you. . . . If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them”

Everything of Jesus his teaching, his miracles, his eating and drinking with sinners, his suffering and death it is all ordered toward the forgiveness of sins. When Jesus enters a town or a room, it is to give gifts to the sinner.

This would even be true when Jesus enters a room to overturn tables; his desire is to cast down all self-justification (the work of the Law) in order that the sinner may hear his word of the cleansing of the sinner (the Gospel). And it is certainly true in our text, in that room where the disciples were hiding in fear. Jesus enters the room to forgive sins, to bestow the Holy Spirit, to Give Faith.

It is the evening of Easter Sunday. Jesus is risen! But the apostles cower in a locked room. They belong to the Lord. They bear his name. They are already clean because of the word Jesus has spoken to them (John 15:3).

They should rejoice! Yet they live at the same time in their sinful flesh, old man/new man. As Luther notes, **“A Christian man is righteous and a sinner at the same time, holy and profane, an enemy of God and a child of God”** (AE 26:232).

The apostles are in the locked room for fear of the Jews—meaning, the theological party of the teachers of the Law. The Law locks people under fear because it exposes our sinful flesh, shows how evil we truly are. The Law accuses the old Adam in us and locks us in fear of punishment.

Even in the Church—since we are all living the old Adam, the sinful flesh, desires to use the Law against another person, holding onto their sins, keeping people locked in fear.

While we are in our sinful flesh (which is at all times, until the end of this life when we’re parted from it and with our Lord), we are, according to our old Adam, living in a locked room of fear. Fear is wrought by the teaching of the Law. The sinful flesh, the old Adam, controls the room, and the doors are locked.

Jesus enters the room. When Jesus enters the room, when his Word is spoken, the room that was once ordered toward fear is now ordered toward the forgiveness of sins.

There is the gift of peace. This peace originates and flows from the verdict of justification spoken at the throne in heaven (Zechariah 3:1–10). The verdict by which the sinner is justified in heaven is now spoken by the mouth of the Lord on earth: ***“Peace to you.”*** Jesus has been given all authority in heaven and on earth, and for the sinner, that is the good news of the Gospel brought to earth.

There is the gift of the Holy Spirit, who “calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith” (Small Catechism, Third Article).

There is the gift of the forgiveness of sins. The forgiveness is a spoken and accomplished fact, delivered into the ears of the sinner. The sin is sent away; it is no more.

Faith is, in this room, the negation of fear. The fear brought by the Law (which accuses of sin) is now replaced by the faith wrought by the Gospel (which frees from sin).

It might be noted that seeing Jesus in the resurrected flesh as victor over death would not yet chase away fear. What if he is in the flesh, victorious, but looking for retribution? The resurrection is not good news simply in that it shows God has this power. But he came in the flesh for grace (John 1:16–17). He was resurrected for us. He came into the room to speak forgiveness. He came bearing gifts. Faith receives gifts.

The apostles did not stay in the room. Jesus sent them out: ***“As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you”*** (v 21). The gift of the forgiveness of sins (and thus the gift of the Holy Spirit and of faith) is sent forth into the world of sinners. The word of Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection is proclaimed. Sinners are gathered into the Church. The Church is built up in the Gospel.

The Confessions explain, **“God is superabundantly generous in His grace: First, through the spoken Word, by which the forgiveness of sins is preached in the whole world. This is the particular office of the Gospel. Second, through Baptism. Third, through the holy Sacrament of the Altar. Fourth, through the Power of the Keys. Also through the mutual conversation and consolation of brethren”** (SA III IV).

Where this Gospel is preached, where sins are forgiven by the crucified, resurrected Lord, there is resurrection for the sinner.

“For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation” (Small Catechism, Sacrament of the Altar).

So, **“Everything, therefore, in the Christian Church is ordered toward this goal: we shall daily receive in the Church nothing but the forgiveness of sin. . . . For we are in the Christian Church, where there is nothing but <continuous, uninterrupted> forgiveness of sin”** (LC II 55).

Amen