

## **John 20:10-31**

**<sup>19</sup> 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, "Peace be with you!" <sup>20</sup> After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.**

**<sup>21</sup> Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." <sup>22</sup> And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."**

**<sup>24</sup> Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!"**

**But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."**

**<sup>26</sup> A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" <sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."**

**<sup>28</sup> Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"**

**<sup>29</sup> Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."**

**<sup>30</sup> Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. <sup>31</sup> 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.**

*Grace is yours. And because grace is yours, so is peace, dear fellow redeemed.*

## **JESUS GIVES PEACE**

Today I'll tell you two stories that illustrate two main points from the gospel reading when Jesus appears to his disciples after Easter. The points are these: First, Jesus gives you peace, and second, Jesus wants you to give peace. The stories are about an old man and a missionary.

## **THE STORY OF THE OLD MAN**

The story of the old man is about St. John the Evangelist. I think I'm safe calling him old because I think he was older than everyone here—in his mid-90s. All the other disciples were martyred, but John was exiled to the remote island of Patmos. And there, he sat down to write his account of Jesus' life. I picture him at a desk next to the sea. He's writing what we know as the Gospel of John, and the Holy Spirit is giving him the words. The Bible says, **“prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” (1 Peter 1:21).**

He is writing because something is keeping Christians awake at night. Something is stealing their peace. We picture peace as a calm surface of the water. If a raging sea is scary and restless, the opposite is peace. John understood that. One time, in a boat, the waves were crashing over the side, and Jesus said to the water, in King James, **“Peace! Be still!” (Mark 4:39)** And the water was like glass. That's what John is trying to do in your heart with his writing.

John knows that as he's writing, false teachers are stirring up doubts about Jesus. Some claimed Jesus never rose from the dead. Some taught that he was a spiritual guru and you had to know his secret code to get into heaven. But John probably did not know what steals your peace. I don't think he anticipated universities where professors try to create doubt about the Bible. He didn't foresee the struggle in your marriage that's making you question if it's worth it. He didn't know the sins in your memory that cause guilt or shame or about your battle with anxiety. But the Holy Spirit knows all about those things, so he gave John just the right words to make your heart like still water. But I've got to warn you. John's gospel is not

designed to calm the storms around you. It's written to calm your heart in the middle of a storm.

## JOHN'S PEACE

This old man by the sea knew all about that. He says, "I've just got to tell you something from my experience! Because I've been there, with a restless heart. I was there on Easter night when we locked ourselves in a room because we were so afraid of what the Jewish leaders would do to us. And let me tell you, Jesus did not calm that storm! We had every right to be afraid of those persecutors. They hated Jesus. They hated us. Who do you think killed the other disciples? How do you think I ended up in exile? Jesus didn't calm that storm.

To tell you the truth, we were also afraid of ourselves. The last time we had seen Jesus, we ran away from him before he died. I remember looking down at our hands, "How could we do that?" Just as you know the things that make you say, "How could I do that?" We don't need to get into the details here in front of everybody but if Jesus appeared in this room, think what he *could* accuse you of.

But this was the moment that changed John's life. When Jesus appeared in that locked room, he didn't have a list of sins. He said, "**Peace to you.**" (John 20:19) Which didn't make sense. They were so afraid, even afraid of Jesus! Is this truly him? Is this a ghost? So he assured them. He showed his scars. He let them touch him. And he repeated it, "**Peace to you,**" this time with an explanation, "**If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them they are not forgiven.**" (John 20:21)

## PEACE OF FORGIVENESS

They may have been a little surprised. Jesus comes back from the dead, and what does he want to talk about, *forgiveness*? You see, Jesus knows something about us—it's that all of us are little sin factories. We constantly produce sins all the time, big ones and little ones, in our thoughts, words, and deeds. It hurts us; it hurts God; it hurts others. And so, Jesus knows that our greatest need is forgiveness, to escape God's

punishment. We don't always realize that's our greatest need when we feel self-righteous. Others of us are just constantly feeling guilty. But when Jesus came back from the dead, what he gives you to calm your heart, is forgiveness. God put my sins on Jesus, and yours too. And that's what made Jesus die. Sinners die. Sinners go to hell. So Jesus did. But when Jesus came back to life, when he escaped hell, guess what that means about our sin? It means they're gone! Easter is all about how Jesus rescued you from sin.

And that's the key to having peace in your heart even when it's stormy in your life. Forgiveness of sins changes the worst-case scenario. The disciples were terrified the Jewish leaders would kill them. And in the end, the Jewish leaders did kill them. But they found peace because what's the worst that could happen? They died. It was painful. They went to heaven! Maybe sickness steals your peace, but with forgiveness, you can be sure God loves you. He's not punishing you. What would he punish you for? Your sins are gone, buried with Jesus! So as pain and surgery and illness stir up the waters around you, in your heart, you know that God is on your side, he will get you through this, and he will get you safely to heaven. Maybe all your responsibilities steal your peace—whether they're work tasks at work, or taking care of kids, or you're just exhausted. But with forgiveness, you can know that God is thrilled with you; he is so proud of you before you even complete one task. So worst-case scenario, if you let your kids down, if you let your boss down, you have the admiration and the smile of your Father in heaven.

That's why Jesus appeared to the disciples and showed them his hands—so they would stop looking at their own hands! “How could we do this?” No! Stop looking at what you do! And see what Jesus has done for you.

## **FOR SKEPTICS OF PEACE**

I know you might be skeptical of that. John knew you might be too. So he wrote the story of the disciples' very own skeptic, Thomas. Thomas wasn't there on the first Easter, and he declared, “I will never-ever believe

unless I touch Jesus' wounds." Well, guess what Jesus did for Thomas—precisely what he needed. One week later, Jesus appeared again. "Thomas, wasn't there something you wanted to do with that finger of yours? Wasn't there something about my side you wanted to see?" And Thomas burst out, **"My Lord and my God!"** (John 20:28)

## **WE BELIEVE EYEWITNESSES**

It's a good thing Jesus appeared to John and Thomas because our faith depends on their eyewitness testimony! That's pretty reliable.

How many people here have been to Moscow? Put your feet in the Red Square? Ok. And how many people here believe that Moscow exists? Well, how can you believe it? Because other people have been there and they've told you about it. That's the value of eyewitness testimony. Guess what St. John wrote in one of his letters: **"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life."** (1 John 1:1). You get the peace of forgiveness because John touched the resurrected Jesus and wrote it down. So when old man John sat down to give you peace, he looked down at his testimony and said: **"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."** (John 20:31) Peace in your heart comes from the Word of God.

## **THE STORY OF THE MISSIONARY**

That's the story of the old man, and I promise the story of the missionary is shorter! It's about a Christian missionary who went to India. This was before cell phones, and really India was still developing, so it was a pretty significant sacrifice. He had no guarantee he would ever see his family again. The only way he could communicate back home was through letters, and even those weren't a sure thing. He had to learn a new language and culture. And where he was going, there were no Christians, so he was starting from scratch. Why would he make all these sacrifices? Because he had peace in his heart when he learned that God forgives him.

## **MISSIONARY DOUBTS**

He didn't always have peace. When he was a young man, training for ministry, a good friend of his died. That loss sent him into a dark period of doubt, where he pretty much gave up on God. Now, many young people go through a phase where they question the faith they grew up with, but that doesn't make it any less traumatic when it happens to you! And this young man was hurting. He had no peace. What if everything he learned was just made up? What if his whole life he had thoughtlessly gone along with the crowd? So for a while, he stopped living like a Christian. But then something changed his life.

## **MISSIONARY'S PEACE**

It was the same thing that gave peace to John on that first Easter — forgiveness. Somebody showed this future missionary that God loved him. Whether he believed it or not, Jesus had died for his sins, and God loved him. That's the kind of God a person can turn back to. And he did.

With the peace of God in his heart, he went back to his Christian friends. He embraced his Christian faith. And he was so transformed by forgiveness that he picked up and went to India to share peace with others. He was living out what Jesus said, **"If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."** (John 20:23) So he warned the Indian people that they would not find peace and forgiveness if they run away from God. But he lived for the moment when he would give them peace. That's the same reason I'm a pastor. The best part of my week is standing right there and saying, "As a called servant of Christ and by his authority, I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Do you know the name of that missionary? Saint Thomas, the disciple. We sometimes call him doubting Thomas. In the first century, they called him Pastor Thomas the Missionary. Isn't it amazing who Jesus chooses to be his messengers of peace?

## **YOU CAN SHARE PEACE**

That's what you are. You may have your doubts. You certainly have your sins. Lord knows I do. But you also know that peace comes from

forgiveness. Jesus forgives you! And now he's given you the job of announcing on earth what is a sure thing in heaven: That those who run from God will never find peace. But everyone, anyone who believes in Jesus, can have peace in their heart. Their sins are forgiven.

Who do you know that needs peace? Who needs to hear that you forgive them, and so does God? Are they in the pew with you today? Are they in your family? At your office? I can guarantee that all those people have stormy waters in their hearts. We all do. And even if you can't fix all their problems, you can calm the storm in here with the peace of forgiveness. That's a peace that only comes from Jesus.

*Amen.*