

Sermon    April 27, 2025    John 20:19-31

## **Peace, Presence, and Power in the Risen Christ**

***Theme: The Risen Christ brings peace to our fears, presence to our doubts, and power to our lives, inspiring us to live by faith in God's love and salvation.***

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The locked room. The trembling disciples. The weight of grief and fear pressing down like a storm cloud. It's the evening of that first Easter, and the followers of Jesus are huddled together, paralyzed by the events of the past days. Their Lord was crucified, buried, and, despite rumors of an empty tomb, they are not celebrating. They are hiding. But into this locked room, into this fog of fear, steps the risen Jesus, speaking words that shatter the darkness: *"Peace be with you."* Today, in John 20:19-31, we see the risen Christ meeting His disciples in their fear, doubt, and weakness, offering peace, presence, and power. This Easter encounter is not just a historical moment; it is God's promise to you and me, calling us to a solid faith in His love and salvation, flowing naturally into a Spirit-led life.

### **Peace in Our Fears**

Let's begin with the disciples' fear. John tells us they locked the doors "for fear of the Jews" (v. 19). They feared persecution, perhaps death. But deeper still, they feared the collapse of everything they had believed in. Jesus was supposed to be the Messiah, yet He died. The empty tomb didn't inspire joy; it confused them. Fear does that—it locks us in, isolates us, and makes us doubt God's promises.

Consider the story of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Lutheran pastor who stood against the Nazis. In 1943, Bonhoeffer was arrested and imprisoned for his resistance. Locked in a cell, facing the specter of execution, he could

have been consumed by fear. Yet, in his writings, we find a man clinging to the peace of Christ. He wrote, “I believe that God can and will bring good out of evil, even out of the greatest evil.” Bonhoeffer’s faith was anchored in the risen Christ, who entered the locked room of his heart, saying, *“Peace be with you.”* And that peace sustained him until he was taken to the gallows shortly before the end of WWII in 1945.

We all have locked rooms—places in our hearts where fear reigns. Perhaps it’s fear of failure, illness, or the future. Maybe it’s the fear that God’s promises won’t hold up in the face of life’s storms. But the risen Jesus does not wait for us to unlock the door. He steps through the walls we build, showing us His wounds—proof of His victory over sin and death. *“Peace be with you,”* He says, not as a fleeting wish but as a divine gift, grounded in His resurrection. We know this peace does not flow from having our lives in good order, but that it is rooted in Christ’s finished work on our behalf. Easter means your sins are forgiven, your salvation is secure, and no fear can separate you from God’s love (Romans 8:38-39). Let this peace inspire you to trust Him, even in the darkest moments.

## Presence in Our Doubts

But what about doubt? Enter Thomas, the disciple who wasn’t there when Jesus first appeared to his disciples. When the others tell him, “We have seen the Lord,” Thomas refuses to believe without evidence: *“Unless I see in His hands the mark of the nails... I will never believe”* (v. 25). Thomas is not a skeptic; he’s a realist, wrestling with the impossible. Yet, notice how Jesus responds. A week later, He appears again, inviting Thomas to touch His wounds: *“Do not disbelieve, but believe”* (v. 27). Jesus doesn’t scold Thomas; He meets him in his doubt, offering His presence.

Think of C.S. Lewis, the brilliant scholar who once called Christianity a “fairy tale.” After losing his mother as a child and witnessing the horrors of World War I, Lewis embraced atheism. Yet, God pursued him. Through conversations with Christian friends like J.R.R. Tolkien, Lewis began to

wrestle with the claims of Christ. In 1929, alone in his Oxford room, he felt God's presence, describing it as being "surprised by joy." Lewis later wrote, "I gave in, and admitted that God was God." Like Thomas, Lewis doubted, but the risen Christ met him, turning his doubt into faith.

Doubt is not the enemy of faith; it's often the soil where faith grows. In our spiritual tradition, we don't shy away from hard questions. We confess that faith is a gift, not a product of our intellect. The risen Jesus meets us in our doubts, not with arguments but with Himself—His Word, His Sacraments, His wounds. When you question, come to the altar, where Christ's body and blood assure you of His real presence. Come to the Scriptures, where His promises stand firm. Easter means Jesus is alive, present with you, turning your doubts into a deeper trust. Let His presence inspire you to say with Thomas, "*My Lord and my God!*" (v. 28).

## **Power in Our Lives**

Finally, Jesus gives His disciples power: "*As the Father has sent Me, even so I am sending you... Receive the Holy Spirit*" (vv. 21-22). This is no mere pep talk; it's a divine commissioning. The risen Christ empowers His fearful, doubting disciples to carry His forgiveness to the world. And that power flows from the Holy Spirit, who works through Word and Sacrament to create faith and transform lives.

Consider the story of Joni Eareckson Tada, who at 17 became quadriplegic after a diving accident in 1967. Faced with a life of physical limitations, Joni struggled with despair, questioning God's goodness. Yet, through the encouragement of Christian friends and the truth of God's Word, she encountered the power of the Holy Spirit. Joni began to share her faith, painting with her mouth, writing books, and founding a ministry that serves people with disabilities worldwide. Like the Apostle Paul, she learned that God's power shows up best in our weakness. The Spirit took her brokenness and made it a platform for the Gospel, touching countless lives with the hope of Christ.

**Easter is not just about what happened 2,000 years ago; it's about the power of the risen Christ in you today. The Holy Spirit is working through the Means of Grace—God's Word, Baptism, Confession, and the Lord's Supper—to sustain and strengthen your faith. This faith, grounded in God's love, forgiveness, and salvation, naturally flows into a Spirit-led life. You don't need to manufacture good works; the Spirit produces them as fruit of faith (Galatians 5:22-23). Forgive as you've been forgiven. Love as you've been loved. Share the hope of Easter with a world locked in fear and doubt.**

## **Conclusion: Inspired by Easter**

**The happenings of those early days and weeks of Easter are not a distant story; they are your reality. The risen Jesus brings peace to your fears, presence to your doubts, and power to your life. Like Bonhoeffer, trust in God's peace amidst the storms. Like Lewis, let Christ's presence turn your doubts into faith. Like Joni, live by the Spirit's power, sharing God's love with a broken world.**

**John concludes our text with a promise: *"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"* (v. 31). Easter means you have life—eternal, abundant, and unshakable. Let this truth inspire you to rest in God's love, stand firm in His salvation, and walk daily in the Spirit's guidance. Amen.**

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