

**2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter: Acts 2:14a,22-32; 1 Peter 1:3-9; John 20:19-31; Psalm 16**

**Today, our Gospel tells us about Jesus appearing to Thomas so that by seeing the resurrected Lord, Thomas would realize that Jesus is both Lord and God. The statement, “My Lord and My God,” tramples allegations by non-believers that Jesus was only a prophet or that Jesus never claimed to be God. If Jesus were only a prophet never claiming to be God, he would have corrected Thomas in front of his inner circle. To claim to be God and not be is blasphemy. But Jesus doesn’t correct Thomas because Jesus is God. And this is such a monumental and important realization that the verses surrounding this declaration of Jesus being God tend to fall under the radar, but these scriptures are pointed at us today.**

**Leading up to the declaration by Thomas, the disciples are hiding behind locked door for fear of the Jews. But so, why are they afraid of the Jews? Given the disciples are Jewish. Yet we know they are afraid because if they are identified as Jesus’s disciples, they will be imprisoned or even killed. And so, they are afraid of persecution and death from the authorities because of their association with Jesus. One of our most basic and strongest instincts is to live. We want to live. And when our lives are threatened, we suffer fear.**

**“Peace be with you,” Jesus says to his disciples today. On a seemingly basic level, Jesus is telling the disciples to not be afraid of persecution and death. And we say these words every Sunday. Peace be with you. Yet do we realize all that Jesus is fully saying when he says this to his disciples? Because what if we understand this not merely in the mindset of well-wishing, but what if we are to understand this as a commandment? The former extending platitude, but the latter imparting strength?**

**In fact, Jesus says more than Peace be with you, although he does say Peace be with you three times in our readings today and so I think Jesus means it. That we are to be permeated with Peace. Jesus says also today to his disciples, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” The commandment to have peace is bestowed upon them along with the commission to speak about Jesus. To spread the Good News about salvation. Which would require of his disciples, inexplicable peace, because it was going to require inexplicable courage. And then he commands them to receive the Holy Spirit. And so, do you see it? The**

peace and the courage to speak openly of Jesus could only be done by the power of the Holy Spirit because the disciples were going to have to rise up and overcome the evil in the world amidst massive opposition against all odds of safety for their lives. And are we willing to do this? We fear even upsetting or offending someone and so we don't speak about Jesus. We don't live in a country, *yet*, where we will be tortured for preaching Jesus.

And so, when we say, "Peace be with you," today, what if we take it in the context of "Be absolutely fearless in your resolve to tell others about salvation, going out with the same level of passion that Jesus Christ did. As the Father sent Jesus, so he sends you." This isn't a *pansy* type of peace that we are wishing upon one another. This is a condition of peace that overcomes all adversity. We err by saying "Peace be with you," in an unthinking manner even though we mean well by it.

"Peace be with you," says Jesus to his disciples. Peace be with you to go out and speak in public. Peace be with you even if they arrest you. Peace be with you when they flog you and tear open your flesh. Peace be with you though this is going to cost you your livelihood. Peace be with you while your family takes a back seat to your ministry. Peace be with you when you are mocked and criticized because of me. Peace be with you when you are misunderstood because the wisdom of God is foreign to the ways of this world. Peace be with you when you are exhausted traveling to reach people who have not yet heard about me. Peace be with you as they stone you to death. Peace be with you when you are shivering on the hard prison floor. Peace be with you when they kick you out of the synagogues for rightly dividing the Word of Truth. Peace be with you when you are called upon to die for what you believe. Peace be with you to have the courage to stand up for the Light in a world that worships darkness. Peace be with you to have the strength to speak the very words of God to people who will hate you because they hated me... "Peace be with you," is the peace that Jesus possessed as he stood in front of Pilate electing to not say a single word in self-defense because he knew he had to be about his Father's business. "Peace be with you," says Jesus to his disciples.

And just like the original disciples, *we* have access to this peace. The ability to still have peace when we are diagnosed with illness, or when we are hurt by

someone who is supposed to love us, or when we are struggling to make ends meet, or we lose someone we love, or we are hit by a pandemic, or we are raising our children in a culture of escalating violence, or we see weather events and natural disasters on the rise and nuclear powers aligning in threatening ways while our own country is divided and fighting, distracted and in turmoil... we *too* are able to have this peace, because of *Whose we are* and *what we have been promised*: an inheritance of which Peter speaks to us today that is “imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for us, who are being protected by the power of God.” It is a peace that cannot be purchased with fortune but can only be gifted by the Prince of Peace who says, “My peace I give to you, not as the world gives, give I unto you,” type of peace.

The Apostle John in our reading today, ends the account of this post resurrection exhortation for peace by explaining why he has written the book of John. The book that we have come to know as the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John. The book that if the authorities were to lay hold of it, they will arrest John. And eventually John is arrested and imprisoned on the Isle of Patmos.

John fearlessly writes this book because he was standing in that locked room when Jesus showed up and gifted John the peace and the power of the Holy Spirit to witness. To execute the Great Commission. And so, John writes these words under fire at the risk of losing absolutely everything, explaining that the words written in his book are written, and I quote: “so that *you* may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name,” (John 20:31). John writes so that *you* may be saved, he says. But so, who is the “you” that John is referring to? Well... “You.” John obeyed Jesus for you. Permitting himself to be sent. John did this not only for the people of his day, but he also did this for the people who would come after. John knew Psalm 102:18, “Let this be written for the generation to come so that a people not yet created may praise the Lord.” John wrote for both his contemporaries and future generations given the Holy Spirit knew the words would be preserved and passed down. How would we know that Jesus is the Word, and that in the beginning the Word was with God and the Word was God if John did not tell us? And how would we have John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son,” if John did not write it?

And how would we hear the love in Christ's words to his disciples during the last supper if John did not impart them to us? And some may say, "But we have also Peter and Paul and Luke and Matthew and Mark and James and Jude." Exactly my point! We know about Jesus Christ as God incarnate and savior of the world because of the people who have gone before us who walked the walk of the Prince of Peace fearlessly declaring the Gospel so that others might hear and believe. Theirs wasn't the type of peace where we wring our hands saying, "Oh, all I want is peace and quiet." Or "I just want peace at any price." Theirs was a Peace so unconstrained that they were fearless! A peace so powerful they were lit on fire and nothing on earth could stop them from speaking out about Jesus Christ. This is the peace that passes all understanding kind of peace. The kind of peace that the prophet Jeremiah spoke of saying: "But if I say I'll never mention the LORD or speak in his name, his word burns in my heart like a fire. It's like a fire in my bones! I am worn out trying to hold it in! I can't do it!" (Jeremiah 20:9). Jeremiah had *no peace* keeping God's words to himself and so he spoke out boldly and relentlessly because *that* is the action that actually brought him Peace! Speaking out to save others!

Romans 10:13-15 tells us that, "*Everyone* who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." [But] how then *can they call* on the One in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe in One of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone to preach? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

"Peace be with you!" is both a commandment and a commission from Christ for *unfaltering faith and unwavering witness. Amen.*