

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**First Sunday after Easter, April 12, 2015**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 198, 202:1, 192:1-6, 321, 203.

Lessons: Job 19:25-27, 1 John 5:4-12, Luke 10:1-17.

Sermon Text: John 20:19-23.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

We read in the book of Acts that "*After his suffering, [Jesus] showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.*" (Acts 1:3) Jesus gave his disciples sufficient proof of his resurrection. On the day of his resurrection, in the evening, after he had appeared to various individuals and small groups, he showed himself alive to ten of the apostles. They were assembled together in a house in Jerusalem and had carefully locked the doors because of fear of the Jews who had murdered their leader.

Now Jesus stood in their midst. And this was the greeting of the resurrected Savior: "*Peace be with you!*" He did this to prepare his disciples to carry on his work following his ascension into heaven.

The disciples were surprised at the risen Lord's appearance. But Jesus showed them his hands, where the marks of the nails were still plainly visible, and his side, where the soldier's spear had left a deep gash. This convinced the disciples. They rejoiced that they actually saw the Lord. It was the same body which had hung on the cross and earned redemption for all men, now glorified.

Today, let's remember

**JESUS' MESSAGE FOR HIS FRIGHTENED DISCIPLES**

- 1. We see fear,**
- 2. And a mission, and**
- 3. Confidence for that mission.**

Jesus' disciples were afraid. Who could tell what might happen to them? The leaders of the Jews hated him enough to kill him without benefit of a legal trial. And now his disciples were afraid for their lives.

They also would have feared for their futures. What would they now do? They were men who as Peter had said "*We have left everything to follow you!*" (Mark 10:28)

What were they to do? For the last three years Jesus had been their leader and most often the spokesman in their lives. Their 'commencement' had now come rather unexpectedly. They – and other followers of Jesus – had some experience going out and preaching the gospel as you heard in our lesson this morning. But now they were pretty much on their own – or so they thought. In his next words to them, Jesus will give them some specific directions about what they are to do now that he will be leaving earth to ascend into heaven.

But at this time they were afraid.

What about us? We may not be afraid for our lives right now just because we are Christians, although in recent months we have news reports of Christians being executed just because they are Christians. But, because of our sinful flesh, we may be afraid of many things.

We may be afraid that people will recognize us as Christians and that will change their opinions of us.

We may be afraid of speaking up for Christ and telling others what God says because we may be mocked.

We may be afraid that our message will be rejected. We may be reluctant to speak of what we believe because so few people believe and accept the Bible as it is, the Word of God speaking to them.

Satan and all his human allies in the world want nothing more than to shame us into silence and then lead us into false belief, despair, and other great and shameful sins, and finally unbelief. And you know that unbelief damns, as Mark tells us: ***"Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."*** (Mark 16:16)

Do we even have doubts? That's certainly what the devil and his unbelieving friends want us to experience. Next week we'll talk about doubt, starting by looking at the doubts of Thomas, the 11<sup>th</sup> disciple who was not with the rest on this evening. Many people who claim to represent Christianity have no use for the real Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Time magazine cover story for April 18, 2014 profiled a "popular [woman] preacher" and "best-selling author" who says "that the faith [people] inherited from their elders is all worn out." But that is surely not what God tells us in the Bible.

What can ease fears and doubts? Isn't it the living and powerful Word of God? ***"For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."*** (Hebrews 4:12) Paul tells us of the power of God's Word in his life: ***"My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power."*** (1 Corinthians 2:4-5) So although we may be afraid, God's Word can give us power, his almighty power.

Jesus now repeats his greeting as an introduction to a commission which he is about to give to them as his representatives. As the Father had sent him into the world, so he now gives the authority and the power of his calling to them. They were to carry the message of the peace of the resurrection into all the world. He sent them forth to preach the Gospel. For peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ is the summary and chief content of the Gospel.

Christ gives all believers – including us – a mission. We read ***"Again Jesus said, 'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.' And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.'"***

To do God's work we need the guidance and power of the Holy Ghost. We cannot do his work by our own strength.

Implied in these words are Jesus' commands in Matthew 28 and Mark 16. He gives his disciples his peace to get them out of their current mindset, to bring them out of their fear. With God's peace and God's command and assurance about the forgiveness of sins, they have God's authority to do God's work.

We, too, have that authority, and must remember Jesus' commands about the mission of his people on earth. Shortly before his ascension into heaven, Matthew records in chapter 28 ***"Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'"*** (Matthew 28:18-20) A similar command is found in Mark chapter 16: ***"He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.'"*** (Mark 16:15-16)

Hand in hand with proclaiming the Gospel, with teaching the Gospel to make disciples of all people, are Jesus' words about the forgiveness of sins. This, after all, is why he came to earth: to take away and to destroy sin, so that mankind should no longer be in slavery to sin with no hope except eternal damnation.

Yes, we know Jesus' commands. Didn't the pastor want us to memorize those words from Matthew 28 and Mark 16 when we were in Catechism Instruction classes? We, too, are directed, are told, yes, are commanded to be Christ's witnesses, just as he said immediately before he ascended into heaven: ***"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*** (Acts 1:8)

In John's words here we have another aspect of that mission to proclaim the Gospel to mankind. We are especially to assure penitent sinners of God's forgiveness and to refuse forgiveness to those who are impenitent.

This command is more than just what the visible church on earth has called “excommunication”. It is more than just preaching law to a sinful world. It is first and foremost proclaiming the forgiveness of sins to penitent sinners. This is heard again and again in our Sunday worship services when the pastor assures you of the forgiveness of sins after we confess our sins.

Jesus was giving his disciples – and us – their Spirit-powered and Spirit-guided mission – to preach the good news about Jesus so people’s sins might be forgiven and they would be made aware of this. How and when does God forgive sins? Listen to these words from Romans: ***“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood.”*** (Romans 3:23-25).

Jesus Christ died for all men and justifies all men, that is, he declares them not guilty. But only those who believe this will receive the benefit of justification.

Only God can forgive sins, but Jesus gave his followers the privilege of telling men that their sins have been forgiven. Believe that God forgives your sins through the merits of Jesus Christ and you will be saved. All believers have this same privilege. Each believer can announce the forgiveness of sins with certainty.

Jesus also gives confidence for the mission by telling them ‘I’ve given you the Holy Ghost. I am not just designating another man, for example, one of you, as the leader of all the rest. I am not, as the Roman Catholic Church claims, designating Peter as my personal vicar on earth or as the first pope. I am giving the Holy Spirit for all my followers.’

Can we have confidence? Yes. Where do we get it? We get it from the Word of God. Are you filled with joy by this good news? Share it with others.

Jesus named his followers as his messengers, as his ambassadors. The power of the Holy Spirit would be with them in the Word: If you remit the sins of anyone, they are remitted to them; if you retain them, they are retained. ***“If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”*** In this way Jesus’ followers received the power to pronounce forgiveness of sins. In this way what we call the “Ministry of the Keys”, or the “Use of the Keys” was instituted. The forgiveness of sins which Jesus earned by his suffering and death should be given to men through the announcement of the Gospel, publicly and privately, to individuals and to groups. This is the absolution, the forgiveness of sins. This is Christ's will and commission: his disciples should pronounce forgiveness, should assure people that Christ takes away their sins. The Gospel is not only a report of the salvation earned by Jesus, but it is the application of this message, the imparting of the forgiveness of sins. But the one who will not accept this forgiveness, this mercy, this salvation, in this way excludes himself from the grace of God.

This power and authority was not given only to the ten apostles present on this evening, nor is it now in the hands of any church hierarchy, but it accompanies the Gospel, and is contained in the commission of Christ to all his disciples to preach the Gospel to all nations. To believers in general, to the Christian congregation that proclaims the message of the Gospel, the keys are given. When pastors exercise this authority they do so in the name of Jesus Christ and in the name of the congregation who has called them to do this work and they do it by the authority of Christ.

May Jesus help us overcome our fear. May we then be about our mission to preach forgiveness of sins. Remember that John the Baptist told anyone who would listen: ***“This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”*** (Luke 24:46-47)

Peter assures us: ***“All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”*** (Acts 10:43) May we be about our Father’s business every day! For Jesus tells us that he is with us always, to the end of the world. Amen.