

SERMON FOR APRIL 24, 2022

TEXT: JOHN 20: 19-31

THEME: PEACE BE WITH YOU

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

Christ is risen, He is risen indeed! Allelujah!

Professor Charles Froelich was the professor who taught me the Greek New Testament language. One of the first words he taught us was the word triskaidekaphobia. Triskaidekaphobia is a bunch of Greek words put together which means fear of the number 13. Many have a fear of the number 13, a fear of Friday the 13th, athletes have a phobia or fear of wearing the number 13 on the back of their uniform, and have you noticed that when you get into an elevator and take that elevator to the 20th floor, that the panel of elevator buttons that you push doesn't have the number 13, that there is never a 13th floor in a building? That is called triskaidekaphobia!

But there are other fears and phobias that people have: scopophobia is the fear of being looked at, phobophobia is the fear of being afraid, ecclesiophobia is the fear of being in a church. Yes, there is such a thing as fear of being in a church. Fear exists, it is real for each and everyone of us, if you don't have one of the phobias that I have mentioned, rest assured that you

are afraid of something, afraid of the unknown, afraid of the future, afraid of being around people, the list is endless. Fear is real, very real, and fear paralyzes. Fear blocks productive living. What is it that you are afraid of? Take a moment and think about what you are afraid of? I want you to take the 3x5 index card and write down on it the specific fear or fears that you have in your life. Go ahead. Write it down. We will come back to it later in the sermon.

We see in our text for today that the disciples locked themselves in a room because they were afraid. What were they afraid of? The Bible says that they were behind closed doors because they were afraid of the Jews. Not the Jewish population, they were afraid of the Jewish authorities who had put Jesus to death. Now wait a minute, you may say, didn't Jesus rise from the grave? Well, yes He did! So why were they still afraid? The Bible doesn't say, but we can look at our lives and note that we are just like the disciples, aren't we? For even as Jesus has risen from the grave, note what you just did, you wrote your fears down, you were able to verbalize your fears. And even if you didn't participate in the exercise, you have come to understand that living life in this world brings with it all sorts of trials, anxious moments, and fears. That is just human nature, and human nature being what it is, the disciples had all

sorts of fears even in the afterglow of the Good News of Easter that Jesus had risen from the grave.

It is in the midst of these fears that the Bible says that Jesus comes to the disciples, right where they are at, fears and all. They were not able to process nor fully comprehend what significance the Resurrection had for them.

And so the disciples are found behind locked doors, first on Easter Sunday evening and then a week later. They locked themselves in to protect themselves, but in doing so they locked themselves into being unable to realize the full significance of what Jesus had done and what it meant for them in their daily lives. In other words, their fears had paralyzed them and blocked them from living productive lives for Jesus. They were essentially prisoners of their own making.

So Jesus comes to them right where they are, fears and all. Our text says that Jesus came and stood among them. That is to say, Jesus came and appeared, not as a spirit but in His glorified resurrected body, right in the middle of the room where they were all assembled. And when He appeared, Jesus said these simple yet powerful words: Peace be with you!

Peace. It is what we all are looking for, it is what we are all striving for, and it is all we really need. But what is peace, exactly?

When we think of peace and hear of peace today, we think of peace in the sense of the absence of war. There are two nations at war, they hold peace talks, and once they come to an agreement, then there is peace between the two parties, that is to say, there is no more war.

That is one aspect of peace. It is an important aspect. You and I have been born into sin, and we are by our very nature enemies of God. We are at war with God, not keeping His commandments, not loving Him as we should, and not loving others as we love ourselves. But Jesus has made us friends with the Father by His life, suffering, death, and resurrection. It is as the Apostle Paul says: “ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.[a] The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. **18** All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; **19** that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. **20** Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. **21** For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” We have been reconciled to God, we are now His friends, we are at peace with God, and God with us, all because of Jesus!

But there is more, so much more, to the peace that God gives. That is why it is called the peace that surpasses all understanding. The peace that the Lord gives is properly understood in the Hebrew word, shalom. Shalom, it means peace, but it also means being in a place where you have a feeling of peace and rest. It also conveys the meaning of wholeness and well being. So when Jesus says: "Peace be to you!" He is actually giving to you that inner peacefulness that is based on the loving relationship the Father has with you because of His Son, Jesus. It means that you are saved, that is, your sins are forgiven, but you also have the added assurance of God's presence with you and His love for you for time and for eternity.

That is what Jesus came to give to His disciples and it is what Jesus means when He says: Peace be to you! And Jesus gives to His followers a real peace, a complete peace. But even then, the disciples still had fears, for the very next week there they were, all locked in behind closed doors. And that is the real world that you and I live in. In this world we have struggles, trials, and tribulations. Jesus has risen from the grave, just as He said He would, but we still have our doubts, our anxious moments, and yes, there are times and there are things that cause us fear. But in the very midst and middle of all these things Jesus is there, to love you, to forgive you, to assure you that it will all work out because He has called you by name and you belong to Him. And

even when we don't fully comprehend or experience God's peace in all of its fullness, Jesus is there to give you peace.

So take those index cards out and look at those things that cause you fear and anxiety. If you haven't done it yet, write them down now. Look at them, and then write on that index card in large letters over those things that cause you fear and anxiety the word PEACE. Write the word in big bold letters. Because that is what Jesus gives you to now, in this moment, today and everyday. For in the midst of your fears, and when you find yourself locked in because of the troubles of the world, Jesus comes to you right in the midst of them and says Peace be to you! He comes to you now, and He comes to give you peace in the Supper, He comes to bring us peace, so that we can bring peace to others in the midst of their fears as well. And now may the peace of God that surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord!

Amen