

Ascension Lutheran Church

Pastor Godkin's Sermon for the week of April 11, 20 10

The Presence of Christ Calms Fears (John 20:19-31)

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and Jesus Christ. Amen. The text for today's homily is from the twentieth chapter of the Gospel according to St. John:

“¹⁹On 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.’ ²⁰When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.”

This is the Word of God.

Dear friends and fellow redeemed, How's it going? What's new with you? Nicetosee get the conversation going. “How are things going?” “Pretty good.” “Nicetosee you. What's new?” “Not too much.” These greetings become automatic. After a while we don't really expect a real thoughtful response; most of the time they are just a polite exchange of conversation. Sometimes these greetings can lead to a more meaningful conversation, other times they are just polite niceties.

In our Gospel text, our Lord Jesus Christ gives a greeting to His disciples. But in that case it was not in the sense of, “How's it going? Nicetosee you again.” The greeting Jesus gives is not trivial just to get the conversation going; it's a greeting that is packed with meaning. It is a greeting of the Gospel message and it is full of grace and comfort. Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.”

Jesus' presence was a sight for sore eyes to the disciples and His words were like sweet music to their ears. Following the crucifixion they became almost paralyzed with fear. Fear had a grip on them so tight that they couldn't even go outside. They had locked themselves indoors, huddled together, likely not saying too much to each other, being preoccupied with their own worries. They had become recluses for the time being and they had no idea what to do next. The fear had inhibited their creativity and their rational thought. To avoid ending up arrested or worse their only thought was to stay quiet and try to keep safe in the locked room.

This is how fear works; it puts up barriers between us and the outside world. Fear makes us want to escape the world. Fear inhibits our communication and it turns us inward on ourselves; it slowly debilitates the individual. The disciples had their fears. They feared persecution and punishment. They had many fears and anxieties. In our midst we all have your life? Anxiety about the future, but sometimes we can let fears about such things speak for themselves. These are legitimate concerns that we all have.

But there are some practical techniques in dealing with some kinds of fears in this world. If you have ever read Dale Carnegie's book, *How to Make Friends and Influence*

People he suggests that you should “do the thing you that is the quickest and surest way every yet discovered to conquer fear, do not sit at home and think about it. Go out and get busy.” And He goes on to say, “You can conquer almost any fear if you do only one thing—you face it head on. Just as a little boy whistles through a storm of fire, so you will outgrow your fears, for you have found the secret: you face the thing that you fear and you make it no bigger than it really is. You conquer your fears and they never折磨 you. You simply outgrow them; you learn to live with them as you would live with a pain in the back. It hurts, but you do not let it control you. It is the same with your fears. You face them and they disappear.”

These techniques have some value to be sure. But the exercise and no amount of positive thinking can overcome the fear of death. People can rationalize death and try to explain it away perhaps but the truth is that physical death and more importantly eternal death, meaning eternal separation from God in darkness and misery is something that no one can stop, that is, except for Jesus. The disciples feared death and rightly so. They thought they were next.

But when Jesus appeared to them, when He came into their midst to live again, His presence made all the difference. He said, “Peace be with you.” His presence was their peace. Their friend and brother and Saviour and our Saviour is alive and He is the wonderful peace that we so crave.

This world, however, is full of distractions. Many people consider our generation to be the most technologically advanced and most progressive, the most intelligent. We love our cell phones and i-pods, video games, and computers and satellite T.V. and soon but these things do not mean that we are more advanced than generations in the past. In many ways we have regressed and become more detached from one another and less concerned about the current events happening all around us. The world has become increasingly focused on pleasures and as a society as a whole a path to the world around us has gained steam like never before.

We all want peace of mind in this world. It’s a hectic, stressful world and at times we seek this peace in the wrong places. Sometimes we try to find a momentary peace or relaxation in watching TV, for example. Now TV can be a learning tool and a good thing provided the program is of an edifying nature, but we have to be careful. It can numb our minds and desensitize us to the ways of the world, which are not the ways of God.

Now TV is an ingenious invention but too often it has been used as a means to program and hypnotize the masses. Take, for example commercial shows. In the course of a one hour show we see roughly 16 minutes of commercials, or about 32 commercials. These commercials tell us we need to buy things, in a way that we are inadequate unless we buy these products.

Scientific studies have shown that when people watch TV they automatically enter a trance like state and marketers know this and they design commercials that produce unconscious emotional moods within the viewer. The aim of commercials is not to appeal to the rational or conscious mind (which usually dismisses advertisements) but rather to implant moods that the consumer will associate with the product these see in real life. It is a sort of mind control.

The same goes with the programs themselves. In many TV shows there are definite world views presented which are entirely incompatible with the Christian world view. We

will only make up your mind to do so. He says, “Healsosays, idenceandcourage.Ifyouwantto .Gooutandgetbusy.”AndHegoes willonlymakeupyourmindtodoso. themind.”

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TVshowstherearedefinite ewiththeChristianworldview.We

find promiscuous sex basically on any sit-com, soap opera, or TV drama. And oftentimes the news, which one would normally think would be as a safe show and scientific documentaries we watch push the concept of evolution until eventually people accept it as scientific fact; this, despite the fact that evolution is no more than a theory and a theory with many gaping scientific holes at hat. As Adolf Hitler once said, "If you tell a lie often enough, it will be believed."

Basically, friends, there are many different voices in the world in which we live and we need discernment to decide which ones we should listen to. If we watch TV or movies, we must test the spirit to see whether what we are watching is compatible with the Word of God.

The fear that we have, they find their solution in the voice of our Saviour. It is Christ's presence that makes the difference. He offers Himself to us, His presence, His holistic peace that comes from a new and right relationship with God and with each other that He has earned for us. John wrote, "I have written these things so that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name." What a comforting message!

It's not as though in this world that all the fear is gone but what is different is that in the midst of our fears and anxieties Christ comes into the rooms in which we are locked out of fear of whatever and He offers Himself through His Word and Sacraments to calm those fears and give us His strength. He offers Himself, His body and blood, His wounds. In Himself, in His Word He offers the peace that passes all understanding and that keeps our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

The real lesson here is how Jesus continues to bring His greeting of peace. Jesus is patient, He is tenacious, and He is merciful. He continued to offer His peace to Thomas and He gave that peace to His church. Now He offers that peace to us.

That peace is the peace that He earned for us with His perfect life, His innocent suffering and death, and His resurrection. It is a peace of forgiveness, life, and salvation and His presence to lead us in His ways. It is the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding so that we may go in peace and serve the Lord. Amen. The peace of God that surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.