

Dear Fellow Redeemed by the blood of our crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ,

Can you believe that has already been **two weeks** since Easter?! In celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ we rejoiced to sing of His victory over sin and death! We heard powerful sermons from God's Word regarding the blessings of that first Easter.

Some years back, a lady leaving church on Easter Sunday said, "**I wish we could hear that every day!**" Well, I'm here today to tell you that

EASTER IS A GIFT THAT KEEPS ON GIVING!

I.

In the 1500's, the Portuguese explorer, **Vasco De Gama**, set sail for the **horn of Africa**. He was searching for a short path to the East Indies. Because of the **powerful storms** at the southern tip of Africa, sailors had named it "**The Cape of Storms.**" For many years no one knew what lay **beyond that cape**, for no ship had ever returned to talk about it! But De Gama, did sail around the **Cape of Storms**. On the other side he found a great, calm sea, and the **shores of India**.

Then the "Cape of Storms" was renamed "**The Cape of Good Hope.**"

Without our Lord's resurrection from the dead, **death** would still be like the "Cape of Storms" on which all **hopes of life and peace with God** would have been wrecked. But on Easter morning Christ turned our Cape of Storms into a "**Cape of Good Hope!**" And we are still receiving His **peace and hope for our own hearts!**

So, why do we read in our text that His "**disciples were gathered together** in a locked room because of "**fear**"? John says they were afraid of "**the Jews.**" The Jews had hated Jesus and His followers before the resurrection; but now that Jesus is missing from the tomb, the Jews suspected that somehow the disciples had taken His body to **fake** His resurrection!

Earlier that day Jesus had **appeared** to Mary Magdalene, to the other women, to Peter and John. All these witnesses were gathered with the other disciples behind locked doors. *The Jews were looking for them, and they were **afraid**, because they felt alone, **without their Savior!*** So, Jesus came to them.

But **how** He came to them! **Their Easter gift kept on giving alright!** For suddenly Jesus appeared "**and stood in their midst!**" Luke's gospel tells us that they thought they were seeing a ghost! So, immediately Jesus said, "**peace be with you.**" And then **He showed them His hands and His side – the marks** of His redeeming work for them. "**Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.**"

Sadly, there are many who do **not believe** that Jesus **appeared supernaturally** in the room. They say that the doors were **not really locked**, or that **He came through a window!** They believe that since Jesus was **true man**, he could not **pass through a locked door** any more than you or I can! For this same reason, they also teach that Jesus **cannot be really and physically** present in **heaven AND in the Lord's Supper at the same time!**

But Easter keeps on giving peace for our own hearts as we receive the very body and blood once and shed for us! You heard how our Lord assured those early disciples of forgiveness and peace with God by showing them the "**marks**" of His own body, and saying, "**peace be with you!**"

So to this very day and **“until He comes,”** He gives us the **“marks”** of His redeeming work **in His Holy Supper!**

Imagine the **“gladness”** that filled the hearts of those disciples, when they saw Jesus! All their doubting, the terror of sin, their anxiety and hopelessness gave way when Jesus said **“peace be with you!”** This is ***peace for our own hearts too, as Easter keeps on giving!***

II.

But Jesus is not yet finished handing out the gifts of Easter. Look at v. 21. For He **“said to them again, ‘Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.’”** Here is given ***the church’s purpose – to proclaim the peace.***

“Peace to you” – these words are spoken at the **beginning of the sermon and at the end nearly every Sunday.** These words are found **in the blessing at the end of the service.**

But now Jesus says even more: **“As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.”** As His Father had sent Him to win and proclaim peace between sinners and the Holy God, made certain by His resurrection, now ***He sends out His disciples*** to proclaim the same message. ***Easter is a gift that keeps on giving!***

As present-day disciples of Christ we **too** are **to proclaim** the peace of His resurrection from the dead! Our Lord addresses the MATHEETAI – **“the disciples”** – ***not just the eleven!*** We know from the record in Luke’s gospel that along with the **eleven** there were **“others gathered together with them.”** (Lk. 24:33)

The commission given on Easter evening was therefore given to ***all the disciples of Jesus – the whole Church.*** So Peter writes in his first epistle to the whole **Christian Church:** **“You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him Who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”** (1Pet. 2:9)

Do we see this as our single purpose as a Christian congregation and church body? It is **not our mission** to bring about social change or political peace in the world. ***Christ sends us to proclaim His peace of Christ to the nations – this is our purpose and work on earth.*** .

What a privilege is ours, dear friends in Christ! For we can do **nothing better** for poor sinners like ourselves than to **proclaim the peace** that has been won for the world! So let’s be doing our work with prayer and diligence **“while it is day; before the night comes when no man can work!”** (Jn 9:4) As we carry out our Lord’s command ***to proclaim His peace, Easter is a gift that keeps on giving!***

III.

Now as soon as He commissioned His disciples to proclaim the gospel’s peace to the world, **“He breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’”** (vs. 22-23) With these words, the Lord of the Church gives ***the authority to forgive and retain sins.*** This authority is called **“The Ministry of the Keys”** in our Lutheran confessions, according to Matthew 16:19, where Jesus refers to the **“binding”** and **“loosing”** of sin as **“the keys to the kingdom of heaven.”**

Sadly, we must here answer a couple of errors on the part of the Roman Catholic Church as well as the Reformed churches, which are so prevalent in our area. First, we note that the Church of Rome teaches that the power or authority to forgive and retain sins, or “bind” and “loose” sins, was given **only to Peter**, whom they claim was the **first Bishop of Rome** and the first

“pope” of the Christian Church. Maybe you have seen the **two keys** on the pope’s crown.

The truth is that there is absolutely no evidence that Peter was ever the bishop of the church in Rome! Besides, our text says that Jesus “**breathed on them.**” **All** of the disciples, received the Holy Spirit and the authority to forgive and retain sins. As stated earlier, we know from Luke’s account that there were “**others**” with the eleven that evening.

At the time of the Reformation, some who opposed Roman Catholicism began to teach that “**no one but God** has the authority to forgive and retain sins.” To this day there are many churches around us who claim that in vs. 22 and 23 Jesus is **only** giving the Christian Church the authority to **proclaim** the gospel of forgiveness and peace to the world.

But Jesus says more than this! In the **original Greek** Jesus says to all His disciples, “*If you forgive the sins of any, which you surely will, they are **certainly** forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, which you surely will, they are **certainly** retained.*”

In announcing forgiveness to the **penitent sinner**, or in **not** announcing forgiveness to the **impenitent sinner**, Christ’s believing disciples are guided by the will of Jesus who sends us. Jesus had said, “**as the Father has sent Me, even so I send you.**” So, whenever the called pastor or any Christian declares the repentant sinner forgiven or the **unrepentant not** forgiven, “**this is as valid and certain in heaven also, as if Christ, our dear Lord, were dealing with us Himself,**” as Martin Luther teaches in the *Small Catechism*.

What a privilege belongs to *all* the disciples of Christ!

To have peace in our own hearts,

to proclaim this peace to other poor sinners, and

to exercise the authority to forgive and retain sins, according to our Lord’s will –

All this because **Easter keeps on giving!** Thanks be to our risen Lord Jesus Christ! Amen.

*And the **peace** of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds **through Christ Jesus.**” (Phil. 4:7) Amen.*