**April 24, 2022 John 20:19-31**

***Surprise!!!***

**Scripture:** *John 20:19-31 NRSV*

*(19)When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." (20)After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. (21)Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." (22)When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. (23)If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." (24)But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. (25)So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." (26)A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." (27)Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." (28)Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" (29)Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." (30)Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. (31)But these are written 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.*

**Notes:**

1. Easter announces the ***resurrection*** of Jesus and promises other resurrections as well.
   1. Sometimes people ***recognize*** him immediately, and sometimes they do not.
   2. His appearance in that locked room ***startles*** them deeply.
   3. He ***heals*** their ***grief*** with the words, *“Peace be to you.”*
   4. Christ ***forgives*** them, ***sends*** them out so that to others they can be the Christ who forgives.
2. Jesus ***appears*** again in that closed room.
   1. Thomas moves from being dominated by doubt to being set free by faith. This is ***resurrection***.
   2. Peter moves from being a coward to ***restoration***. This is ***resurrection***.
   3. Paul was lifted up from a persecutor’s career to an apostle’s ministry. This is ***resurrection***.
   4. In what ways do you feel you have ***disappointed*** ***Jesus***?
3. The good news of Jesus Christ is that, ***Jesus*** ***chooses*** to raise us up, this is ***resurrection***.
   1. We ***hear*** the message of peace, the ***call*** to a new responsibility, and are ***restored*** to a true life.
   2. How are you being ***raised*** ***up*** by the raising up of Jesus?
   3. What ***new*** ***life*** does he communicate that leaves you who you are, yet different?
   4. Give thanks that Jesus is not alone in his ***resurrection***, that each of us are ***raised*** with him, from death to life.

**Script:**

Have you ever had a surprise guest show up at your home? There are times when these surprise guests are embarrassing or troubling; like when your house needs cleaning or everything is in disarray and then there are those times when they are a very pleasant surprise. Before Stevin headed back to school, he was remembering the time that Sheldon said he would not be able to come home for the holidays because he was scheduled to work. But Sheldon surprised us all when he got home and surprised Stevin and then they came to the High School where we were attending Shane’s wrestling match. We were pleasantly surprised.

Have you ever had surprise visitors? How did it make you feel? How did you react? What do you remember from that visit? Every surprise visit brings with it a mix of emotions and memories that we take with us.

Well today in our sermon passage, Jesus surprises his disciples in there upstairs hiding place. After all, he’s supposed to be dead! But he comes among them alive again, more alive than he was before. Join me in the reading our sermon passage from John 20:19-31.

John 20:19-31 NRSV (19)When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." (20)After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. (21)Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." (22)When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. (23)If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." (24)But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. (25)So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." (26)A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." (27)Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." (28)Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" (29)Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." (30)Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. (31)But these are written 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.

Easter announces the resurrection of Jesus and promises other resurrections as well. The Gospel stories about Jesus after his resurrection reveal a few things about what it means for him to be alive again and his body to be glorified. Sometimes people recognize him immediately, and sometimes they do not. He enters a room even when the door is locked. The wounds of crucifixion remain visible in his hands and feet and side. He hears and speaks, he consumes food, and on one occasion he even fixes breakfast for his disciples.

The resurrection stories reveal to us a few things about how Jesus remains the same and how he is different as a result of having been killed and brought back to life. But it seems to me that these resurrection stories are more concerned with what happens to the disciples: how they remain the same and how they are different as a result of encountering Jesus raised from the dead. Today’s Gospel is a case in point.

The story begins on the evening of Easter Day. Fear has overcome the disciples. The blood has drained from their faces. Their leader has been put to death by the authorities and hastily buried, and they fear that they will be next. So they hide out in a locked room with the curtains drawn, listening carefully to every sound in the street below. They regard themselves as dead men. And what happens? A dead man come back to life appears among them, a man they know well. This is the same Jesus whose crucifixion took place two days before.

They weren’t much help to him then. One of their members, now gone, turned traitor and arranged for Jesus capture. All but the youngest fled when the going got rough. The senior one among them followed at a distance, but when questioned by a servant girl he denied he had ever heard of Jesus. These so-called disciples showed themselves to be washouts. Now Jesus is back. They have failed him, and it’s time they paid the price.

His appearance in that locked room startles them deeply. So does what he tells them: *“Peace be with you.”* He does not condemn them, or even rebuke them. Instead, he dissolves their fear. He heals their grief. *“Peace be to you.”*

He does not ignore the past, but graciously moves beyond it. The disciples are forgiven for their failure. This forgiveness sets their distraught hearts at rest. That is his gift of peace. This is no inactive peace; it is a peace that empowers, that makes action possible, and so Jesus issues a command: *“As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.”* As the disciples have received, so they are to give to others. They are to spread the gift of peace to any who are trapped, as they once were, in failure and grief and fear.

Christ who forgives them, sends them out so that to others they can be the Christ who forgives. He exhales a great, warm breath into their faces, and in this way bestows a new source of life, the Holy Spirit, who will be as necessary to them as the air they breathe. Thus, they are empowered to extend the dominion of forgiveness in which they have been included.

These clustered disciples remain in many ways the same. But in important ways they are different from what they were before. Once they were failures. Now they have passed beyond the point where failure and success have meaning. Once they were overcome by fear. Now they have encountered other realities that alone deserve their allegiance.

The story has a sequel. Thomas was absent from the group when Jesus appeared, and later his wide-eyed buddies tell him what happened. Neither their excited words nor their changed lives are enough to convince him that what they say is true. He demands other proof, familiar evidence: the sight of Jesus’ face alive again, the feel of his warm and wounded flesh. It is for this reason that he has been called Doubting Thomas. But give him some credit. His doubt is no detached, intellectual game; it engages the center of who he is. Thomas doubts from the heart.

The final scene occurs a week after Easter Day, in other words, today. Jesus appears again in that closed room, uninvited. Again, he says, *“Peace be to you.”* Then he addresses Thomas. Jesus does not rebuke him; he doesn’t rebuke him for his desertion during the long hours of the Passion, nor for his absence the previous Sunday night. Instead, he helps resurrect Thomas. It is from his own particular narrow grave of uncertainty and insistence that Thomas rises.

In some ways he remains the same Thomas. Those acquainted with him still recognize his face. Yet the encounter with Jesus changes him. He goes from a heart full of doubt to a heart full of belief. The refusal to believe without tangible proof that came so easily to his lips seven days before gives way to a bold confession of faith, the salutation he blurts out: “My Lord and my God!” Throughout the Gospel there appears no better statement of who Jesus is than these words from the one we would do well to call Thomas the Believer. Thomas moves from being dominated by doubt to being set free by faith. This is his resurrection.

The disciples in that locked room leave behind a life of failure, guilt, and fear in order to enter a real life where they experience the deep peace of forgiveness and share that peace with others. This is their resurrection. The New Testament tells us of still more who are resurrected by the risen Jesus: people who remain themselves, yet are somehow different.

There are places in the story where Peter is prominent. He moves from being the knowing coward during the time of the Passion to the one whose restoration represents the restoration of every disciple. Peter, who denied Jesus in the face of a servant girl’s questioning, appears at Pentecost as someone very different. To a turbulent crowd that could easily grab him and beat him, he does not hesitate to announce that Jesus lives despite their malice, and that Jesus offers them forgiveness and hope. Peter is still Peter: boisterous, emotional, passionate. Yet he is different. This is his resurrection.

Paul is another raised up by the raising up of Christ. He is not simply lifted up from the dust of Damascus Road after being thrown by his horse. He is also lifted up from a persecutor’s career to an apostle’s ministry. The faith he once tried to destroy, is given to him as a commission to spread. The fire of hatred inside him gives way to the living flame of love. Paul is still Paul: intense, intellectual, zealous. Yet he is different. This is his resurrection.

In what ways do you feel that you have disappointed Jesus? How have you failed to live up to the expectations of the church? Notice I said the church and not Jesus. Many times, organized religion places expectations and demands upon those who try to live under their guidance. And while these demands mean well, they often place a heavy burden upon those who are not as confident or experienced in the practice of their faith.

But the good news of Jesus Christ today is that He chooses to raise us up, just as he was raised up and just as he raised up the disciples that followed him so many years ago; this is resurrection. We remain our familiar selves, yet we become different. The worst part of who we are hears, that’s right we hear the message of peace, the call to a new responsibility, and is restored to a true life. We rise up, we rise up from our own particular narrow grave to join the company of those–Thomas, Peter, Paul, Jesus and the other disciples–who now live on the far side of death.

I ask each of you to consider yourselves, to look inside, and to answer some questions. How are you being raised up by the raising up of Jesus? From what particular death are you being set free? What message of peace does the risen Jesus speak to you? What commission does he give to you? What new life does he communicate that leaves you who you are, yet different?

Each of us will have our own answers to these questions. We as followers of Christ need time to reflect upon these questions, and then give thanks that Jesus is not alone in his resurrection, but that each of us are raised with him, from death to life.

These words are given to you this morning in the name of the God who out of defeat brings new hope and new alternatives: the ever-glorious Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.