

Introduction:

This morning as our celebration of Easter continues, we will look at how Jesus' resurrection affects our lives. Although Easter should be all the answer we need for everything in life and death, we still have doubts and fears about our earthly and spiritual lives. This morning we will see how Jesus silences our doubts and fears using three sermonettes, one for each of our readings. Let us join in the hymn that will introduce us to those sermonettes, Jesus Lives the Victory's Won.

Sermonette #1. John 20:19-31

¹⁹ *On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors 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 side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.*

²¹ *Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."* ²² *And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."* ²³ *If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."*

²⁴ *Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came.* ²⁵ *So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!"*

But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."

²⁶ *A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"* ²⁷ *Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."*

²⁸ *Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"*

²⁹ *Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."*

³⁰ *Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.* ³¹ *But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

Do you know what fear is? Not the fear of spiders, storms or the dark, but real fear that paralyzes you so that you can only hide from danger? Fear that knows death is right around the corner?

Thankfully most of us have never been in a situation where we have felt this kind of fear, but if we have we might understand what the disciples were feeling on Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday.

This is the type of fear that gripped the disciples and the followers of Jesus. All they could do was hide behind a locked door in the upper room waiting for the soldiers to arrive.

Traitors and rebellions were not viewed kindly by the Roman government. Shortly before Jesus crucifixion, Pilate had received a reprimand from Rome because he had killed over 1000 people accused of being part of a rebellion to overthrow Rome. Throw into this fear of Rome, the Jewish leaders who were whispering in Pilate's ear to crush this revolt and the news from the woman that the body was gone. It seemed like the followers of Jesus were being set up as terrorists and sooner or later someone would be coming to get them.

The door was locked, everyone inside the room is listening, waiting for any sound that would indicate what is going on outside or who is at the door. And then they hear, "Peace be with you!" And Jesus is there with them in the room.

Jesus silenced most of their fears with his appearance and his words of peace, but he did not silence them all. Thomas was not there.

Do you know doubt? Doubt is really a lack of faith in some aspect of God. It is a lack of trust in a promise that God has made to us about our spiritual or earthly life. There are over 500 times in the Bible where we are told to put complete faith in God, trust in him, do not doubt or do not be afraid. Not doing that is a sin and it's a sin we all commit.

Thomas is the definition of doubt, isn't he? He famously shows his lack of faith not only in what the women and his fellow disciples said, but also in what Jesus had said himself. **“Unless I see the nail marks and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand in his side, I will not believe.”**

Jesus did not want his disciples to live in fear, nor did he want Thomas, or anyone else to doubt his resurrection. He silences those doubts and fears with another appearance to them. He invites Thomas to come and see, to do exactly what Thomas had wanted to do.

Thomas only believed because he saw and felt it for himself. But Jesus tells us what a blessed thing it is to have our fears and doubts silenced by a faith and trust in him which hasn't seen for ourselves. **Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.**

Jesus continues to silence our doubts and fears by his appearance in His Word. Although we may not be able to physically touch him, or see him with our eyes, he invites us to come and to meet him in that Word and through that Word to come into contact with the Gospel. The Gospel silences our fears because we hear and experience the wonderful love and forgiveness that only Jesus brings. John tells us that this is the reason we have been given the Word; to silence doubt and fear by building faith. John writes **These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that by believing you may have life in his name.**

Jesus silences our doubts and fears by appearing to us in his Word. In that Word, he shows all that he has done to save us.

Sermonette #2. Acts 2:14a, 22-32

¹⁴ *Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you:*

²² *“Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. ²³ This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. ²⁴ But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. ²⁵ David said about him:*

“ ‘I saw the Lord always before me.

Because he is at my right hand,

I will not be shaken.

²⁶ *Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;*

my body also will live in hope,

²⁷ *because you will not abandon me to the grave,*

nor will you let your Holy One see decay.

²⁸ *You have made known to me the paths of life;*

you will fill me with joy in your presence. ’

²⁹ *“Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. ³⁰ But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. ³¹ Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. ³² God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.*

The Pharisees had paid the guards to spread the word that the disciples had conspired to steal Jesus' body. Then, they spread the rumor this story of Jesus' resurrection was part of the conspiracy to keep the teachings of this man alive. Normally, in any other place, if these two competing truths were swirling around, someone would have started an investigation to find and locate the body and the disciples in order to put this ugly rumor to rest.

We don't know a lot about what the Pharisees did during those next 50 days after Jesus' resurrection, but they did not investigate. If they did investigate, their own lies about Jesus might have been uncovered.

While we don't hear much about the Pharisees, we do know what the disciples did. If it was a conspiracy, the disciples were not doing a very good job of keeping the secret. One of the things that make a conspiracy a conspiracy is the secret that is involved. To keep that secret alive, you keep that secret close, in a small group of people.

But the disciples were not hiding or keeping a low profile. They went to all their usual places. They fished in Galilee, they celebrated the festivals in Jerusalem.

Jesus had calmed the disciples fears and doubts over the 40 days after his resurrection and he had given them a job that was the opposite of hiding and secrecy. They were to be visible. They were to preach and teach the Word of God to all people.

During the festival of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came to the disciples and blessed them with spiritual gifts in order to take this message out to the world.

But the disciples were not the only ones who were in Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost. There were many Jews from Israel and the surrounding countries. The news of Jesus had reached far and wide. Many had heard about how he had been put to death and the competing stories of what happened after this death. Many of these people wondered what the truth was.

Peter stands before the crowds of people from Jerusalem, from the many nations around Judea, and even in front of the Pharisees and he preaches to them a Law/Gospel sermon about who Jesus was and what he had done.

There were, no doubt, many in that crowd were living with guilt and sadness after Jesus' crucifixion. Maybe they hadn't fully understood what they were calling for when they yelled, "Crucify!" They didn't understand who Jesus was or why he needed to be killed. But in the days after the crucifixion and the resurrection, they had realized that they had done wrong in killing an innocent man.

Peter reaches out to the people, calling them to repent of all of their sins, especially of putting Jesus to death. But he also offers to them the forgiveness of the resurrected Savior, promised of old.

Often our sins lead us to live in guilt and fear. Although we should know where to turn, we become lost in doubt that our Savior is loving and we fear other people finding out about our sins. What if people find out that I have been cheating others, what if people find out I have been coming to church for the wrong reasons, what if people find out that I have an impure heart when it comes to sex, drinking, or drugs. What happens if people find out that I am a sinner?

Peter called out to all the people to repent and then led them to the cross of Jesus to see their forgiveness. Jesus silences our doubts and fears by leading us to his cross to see the forgiveness that he has won for us. Our forgiveness is sealed in his resurrection.

We do not have to live in fear of judgment and rejection. Forgiveness of sins and a new life in Jesus is preached to all people, even sinners like you and me.

Sermonette #3 1 Peter 1:3-9

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷ These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, ⁹ for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

There are certainly many things that Jesus could have done so that people would have believed that what the apostles were preaching and teaching to them was the truth. He could have given them each a special object, a special handshake, or a special outfit. But he didn't give them a trinket or an object. He entrusted them with the same tool that he himself used. He entrusted to them the Law and Gospel, through which the Holy Spirit would work, to silence doubt and fear.

The Gospel in Word and Sacrament, calls us into Christ's family and reminds us that we are part of that family through faith.

Peter says, "**We have given us a new birth into a living hope through Jesus Christ.**" The living hope which is ours is the same hope we have been speaking about over the last two weeks. Because of Christ, we will not die eternally, we will live in the joys of heaven. This new birth and living hope in Christ which silences our doubts and fears will never perish, spoil, or fade, it is a promise that lasts forever.

What is the point of faith in Jesus as our Savior, if all we do is doubt his promises about heaven and earth? Even though we know we shouldn't doubt, those doubts persist, don't they? In the midst of our earthly struggles, the devil points out every problem and trial we have as proof that Jesus is not as good as his promises. The devil wants us to see our struggles as a lack of love of the Lord, instead of the Lord leading us to trust in him alone for all that we need.

Our sinful nature focuses on what we don't have, the lack of things we sinfully want in this world, rather than all that our Savior has given to us.

The battle against our doubts and fears rages on no matter how old we are, or where we are at in life. There is never enough money, retirement savings, creature comforts, or security to please us. Our sinful nature always wants more.

The goal of our faith is salvation and through faith, the Holy Spirit gives this to us through Christ. These gifts are sealed to us forever. We do not need to worry or doubt.

Jesus has made us his children in order to silence our doubts and fears so that we will always be able to hear his promises and think, this promise he made to me. We will see his suffering and death and think, and know Jesus died to take my sins away. We will look at his resurrection and know, that resurrection is mine, I will rise too.

Jesus silences our doubts and fears by showing us all that he has done. He is risen, He is risen indeed, and all the promises of Jesus are sealed to us in that resurrection. We will rise too. Amen