

**Sermon April 7 2024 John 20:19-31 “Seeing is Believing?” Hymn
LSB 464**

Dear fellow redeemed of the Risen Lord Christ, the Holy Gospel for today has two parts. In the first, Jesus appears to ten disciples, hiding behind locked doors for fear of the Jews.

They were holed up in confusion that first Easter evening due to the news reports they had been receiving—from Mary Magdalene, who said she saw Jesus; from Peter and John, who saw the grave clothes and the empty tomb but no Jesus; and then two disciples walking to Emmaus, said that Jesus had been with them. They didn’t know quite what to make of it all.

Add in the guilt that still oppressed them all. Peter for denying his Lord, the others for running away like cowards.

They had all been so brave beforehand. **We’ll never leave you, even if we have to die with you**, they’d all said. Right.

Big words, but look at them now. When the going gets tough the tough get going? Well, they got going alright! As far from Jesus as they could. And now they were ashamed.

Shame, fear, sadness, and confusion. That first Easter morning, the apostles, the pillars of the church, were a mess.

Until Jesus came to them. He didn’t knock, didn’t open the doors . . . He simply walked right through the walls and appeared among them.

“Peace be with you,” He says. And He shows them the scars on His hands and side.

Only *then*, we are told, *the disciples were glad*. Suddenly, all that was oppressing, shaming, burdening, confusing, and worrying them *was gone*. None of it mattered anymore.

Jesus was there. Jesus was alive. *Jesus forgave them*. So you can be the farm that they were glad.

Then there is the second half of our lesson, about the one who was not with them that night: Thomas. Doubting Thomas. Still stuck in his shame, fear, and confusion Thomas.

Thomas is still speaking big words. That’s what we do when we’re afraid, isn’t it? We talk big and try to cover up what we’re really feeling inside.

Thomas talks big: **“Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.”**

Eight days later, Jesus says OK, Thomas—here you go! Interestingly, the Scriptures never tell us if Thomas actually did it—put his fingers in the holes or his hand into Jesus’ side.

Maybe he chickened out. Maybe Jesus had to grab his hand and stick it in his side! But then Thomas, too, is overwhelmed by a flood of joy, relief, and forgiveness. **“My Lord and my God!”** he cries out, and please note that **Jesus does not** correct Thomas.

Jesus is indeed Thomas' Lord and God. So maybe we should know him as "Confessing Thomas" and not doubting Thomas.

So, this is a Gospel story with two parts, two halves.

What unifies them are ***Jesus's wounds***.

Those ***fresh*** wounds didn't go away when Jesus rose from the dead. Those ***glorious*** wounds are still there, those holes in Jesus' hands that you could see through.

He showed them his side had been torn open by the soldier's spear to prove that He was dead, a hard and deep thrust. He showed them to *all of them*, not just Thomas.

Why? To prove to them that this body, which had been on the cross, is alive again. **He is Risen!**

His body, which had been crushed by the results of sin, its wages, and death, was not conquered by sin and death.

This body of the Lamb of God, which was offered up for the sins of the world, has taken away the sins of the world.

So, Jesus's fresh, glorious wounds are not there to remind the disciples of their guilt but to proclaim His victory and their forgiveness.

Jesus wanted them and us to know that He took our sin and guilt and condemnation - **see?** He was wounded and died for it all. But look at that death now - ***the grave is empty! O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?***

And look at those wounds now - ***they are glorious!***

For they show our Lord's love. They show our Lord's compassion. They show His victory over sin, death, and hell.

And so Jesus shows them off.

See them, touch them, and rejoice! ***The Strife is Over; the Battle is Done!*** Then Jesus adds, "**Peace be with you.**" Peace of heart, mind, and soul in the forgiveness of your sins.

And so the disciples' big words, which until now had caused them such shame and pain, and Thomas' big words, which proclaimed his unbelief, were now met and overcome **by Jesus' big words: Peace be with you.**

You are forgiven. Now go and do the same. Go and forgive others. **Just as the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.**

The church is all about forgiveness granted for Jesus' sake. It does a lot of other things—showing mercy, encouraging and supporting one another, and living together in faith—and those things are important, but they are not what the church is all about.

The church is all about forgiveness. That is job one. That is what makes the church the church. And when the church forgives, she is doing exactly what Jesus not only *commanded* that night but also did that Easter night: *showing His wounds*.

When we forgive, we are saying **Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world**, including yours.

Look at the holes in His skin. Your sins are on Him and not on you. You can be sure that your sins are forgiven.

Those are the big words Jesus has now given us to say. His words of forgiveness. And we must never tire of saying them. Or hearing them.

We must never tire of rejoicing when those nail-pierced hands baptize another person at this font, and their sins are washed away.

We must never tire of rejoicing when we hear those words spoken to us shamed sinners. We return to our Lord every Sunday with our tails between our legs to be greeted by those words: ***Peace be with you. I forgive you all your sins.***

We must never tire of our Lord giving us the Body and Blood that hung on the cross, not for us to touch and feel merely, but for us to eat and to drink, for the forgiveness of our sins.

And know that **blessed are [we] who have not seen and yet have believed.** Blessed are we who have been given the gifts of faith, forgiveness, and life.

But we have those big words to say, not only here in the church but out there in the world: ***I forgive you.***

When you don't or *won't* say those words, what is your silence saying? And why do we do that?

What locked doors are you hiding behind? What sin and fear have locked you in? What can you not entrust to the forgiveness and love of the Lord?

But at just such moments, that's when Jesus comes to you, through His Spirit, through the word spoken by the Church, or through a brother or sister in Christ.

Jesus comes through the locked doors of your heart and shows you His wounds. He knows you've been wounded and hurt; those are the wounds that He now bears.

He knows the hell you've been through. He knows the pain and fear. He knows the betrayal and slander—even from your closest friends.

He knows. **See my hands and my side**, He says. And then: **Peace be with you**. Your wounds are my wounds, your sins my sins, your death my death. ***I forgive you.***

And so you, too, now, can forgive. Not in your strength, but with His. When we forgive, we show the world the power of the cross, the power of Jesus' death and resurrection, and the power of Jesus' forgiveness.

That forgiveness begins here, but it doesn't end here. It goes with you. Jesus breathed on His disciples and commissioned them as His apostles.

Pastors are called and ordained to speak that same Word of forgiveness to you.

But you, too, as the royal priesthood of all believers, baptized into Christ and His wounds and given His Spirit, are sent into your homes and vocations with these same big words of forgiveness.

That those still locked in sin, fear, and shame may see the wounds of Christ, believe, and confess: **My Lord and my God.**

The disciples needed that that night. Not a day goes by when we don't need it. Especially during those times when we are shamed by our sins and think: ***What will the Lord do with me?***

What will He do with you? We heard today - He forgives you!

See His wounds? His *glorious* wounds? They're for you. They're to unlock whatever has you locked in, cowering in fear, and wash away your mess of sin.

See His *glorious* wounds? They're for you. So, take eat, take drink. Then depart from this altar of grace in peace. For Christ is risen! [He is risen indeed! Alleluia!] Alleluia!

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.