

John 20:19-31
Second Sunday of Easter
Sermon Series: What Is Truth?
I'm Good with God!

Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church
Winchester, VA
Pastor Paul Krueger
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¹⁹ On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, 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's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

²⁴ Now Thomas (also known as 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."

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 performed many other 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 Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

We pray. Lord, sanctify us with the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

My mind likes to do this little trick where it feels tired all throughout the day, but the moment I lay down to go to sleep, sleep seems to be the last thing my mind wants to do, and it just starts racing. And it seems that this happens to me most frequently on Saturday nights, the night of the week followed by my biggest morning of the week. Coincidence? No, it's not coincidence it's uncertainty, a constant questioning in my mind: "Am I ready for tomorrow? Did I forget anything? Do I have all my ducks in a row?" Sometimes that keeps me up on Saturday nights.

What keeps you up at night? The scenario I just described probably isn't all that unfamiliar to you, is it? So what have you found are the things that keep you awake at night? For some of you it might be something work related like for me. Maybe your concerns are less about work and more about your financial situation. I don't have kids, but I imagine those of you who do have spent a good chunk of time staring at the ceiling over your beds wondering how things are going to turn out for your kids or maybe even wondering how your kids are going to turn out! And for you kids, it might be schoolwork, making friends, or fitting in. And before too long it'll start to be, "What in the world am I going to do with the rest of my life?"

There are a lot of uncertainties in our lives. Sometimes those uncertainties are stressful, some of them more than others. And sometimes they can grow to be so stressful that we even lose sleep over them. Let me get down to the nitty-gritty now and ask you a personal question. Have you ever lost sleep over the question of whether or not you are "good with God?" Have you ever lain in

bed or maybe spent time earlier in the day thinking about something or some things that you've done or said and wrestled with the question of whether God could ever really forgive you for those sins?

I don't know for certain what was going through the minds of Jesus' disciples as they gathered together in that room in Jerusalem on Easter Sunday. The apostle John tells us that they were afraid. He says they were hiding for fear of the Jewish leaders. But I don't think the only fear that was occupying their minds was what the Jewish leaders might do to them. I imagine they must have been questioning their own actions over the course of the last couple days too. Despite all that they had said and promised, they had abandoned Jesus and left Him to die. So they must have been wondering how they could possibly be good with God. They may even have been doubting whether God could ever forgive them for abandoning His Son.

And now they had been told by the women who had gone to the tomb that morning, and by Peter, and by those two men from Emmaus that Jesus was alive. He had risen! It's difficult to imagine the mix of emotions they must have felt as they contemplated that new piece of information. If Jesus was alive as these witnesses said, then that was great, it was amazing, but that first conversation was going to be a little awkward. And so when Jesus appears, the initial reaction we see in those disciples isn't one of overwhelming joy, it's one of apprehension.

Maybe it's difficult for us to imagine what was going through their minds, or maybe it's not that hard. What if Jesus appeared in this room, right now, how would you feel? Would you shout for joy, run up, and give Him a big hug or would you shrink back into your seat a bit. Would your mind perhaps dart back to some of the things you've done earlier this week or even longer ago than that, thinking, "Man, I hope He doesn't ask about that, because that would be an awkward conversation"? It wouldn't just be awkward; it would be an impossible conversation, wouldn't it? There is no acceptable excuse that we could give to Jesus for any of the times we've let Him down through our words, and actions. And those disciples in that room in Jerusalem had no excuse either.

What a blessing then, that when Jesus appeared to them it wasn't to call them to account for their actions, it was to bring them the peace of forgiveness. Jesus came to assure them and us that our sins are forgiven and that we are good with God.

The first thing Jesus did was quiet their fears and uncertainties by speaking those simple words, **Peace be with you**. If Jesus still held a grudge against the disciples, if He still held their sins against them, then He wouldn't have been able to say that. There would have been something between them, but it wouldn't have been peace. So when Jesus said, **Peace be with you**, to His disciples—when He says, **Peace be with you**, what He is telling you is that the guilt of your sins is gone.

Then Jesus went on to demonstrate how that is possible, how the relationship between us and God could be one of peace. John writes, **After He said [Peace be with you], He showed them His hands and His side**. He showed them marks that were left by the wounds inflicted on Him as He took our place on the cross, reminding His disciples, reminding *us* that He died so that we could live, He was punished so we wouldn't be. He suffered and endured all that He did so that we could be at peace, knowing that we are good with God. And the fact that Jesus was standing there—risen, alive, and proclaiming that peace to His disciples—proved that the peace He has to offer us is real.

Those marks on Jesus' perfect, resurrected body testify to how our forgiveness was *won*. But Jesus also took the opportunity that evening to show us how the news of that forgiveness is *offered* to us. Back in January, we spent a Sunday studying a sermon that Jesus delivered in His home town of Nazareth. If you remember, He stood up in the front of the synagogue there and read a passage from the scroll of Isaiah: **The Spirit of the LORD is on me, Jesus read, because He has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.** Then He rolled up the scroll and said, **Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing** (Lk 4:18-21).

Jesus offers us the forgiveness that He won for us on the cross through His preaching—through His Word. But Jesus' time in world was coming to end He was about to return to His heavenly Father. And so on that Easter Sunday evening, He breathed on His disciples and said: **Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.** It's pretty spectacular when you think about it. Jesus is telling these sinful men that they now have the authority and the power to deliver the message of His Word, the message of the law and the gospel, the message of sins and sins forgiven. What an amazing promise. What an awesome privilege!

Jesus didn't just give that power and right to the Twelve Apostles, He's given it to you as well. When Jesus came to you in His Word, when He poured out the Holy Spirit on you in Holy Baptism, He not only offered you the peace of forgiveness which He won for you on the cross, He also appointed you to be His ambassador, giving you the power—the authority—to take that message of forgiveness from sin and share it with repentant sinners. "This mission which the Father sent Me to accomplish," Jesus says, "I am sending you to carry to completion." **As the Father has sent Me, I am sending you.**

Jesus did absolutely everything that was needed to save you from the punishment your sins deserve. That is why I am able to say to you as we gather here each week for worship that your sins are forgiven. That is why you are able to say to your children, to your spouses, your friends, and your brothers and sisters in Christ, "I forgive you." And when you say that, you are not just announcing your own forgiveness, you are declaring God's forgiveness. How can you do that? How can I do that? Because Jesus has entrusted His Word to us. He has given it to us, given us the power to use it, the right to use it, He has even commanded us to use it!

So if there are sins from your past that are still haunting you and that keep you awake sometimes at night, if you are repentant of those sins then let me assure you right now that your sins are forgiven. They are forgiven not because *I* am telling you that, but because *what* I am telling you is the promise Jesus has given you in His Word.

Jesus promises the forgiveness of sins. He can promise it because He has won it for us. He can promise it because He offers it to us. And we can receive it through faith—faith that what He promises in His Word is true. That what John tells us when he says, **these [words] 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.**

The truth that Jesus shares with you today is that you are good with God. You are good with God because Jesus has paid for sins. You are no longer an object of God's wrath; instead, He has made you an instrument of His Gospel, a truth which our resurrected Jesus assures us of in His Word.

There are all kinds of things that we can't be certain of. How you're going to score on a test, when your sick kids will get over their colds, whether the money you make this year will be enough to support you or your family. But despite all of that, despite all of those uncertainties, you *can* have peace. Real peace that comes from knowing you are good with God. He isn't waiting to punish you for your sins because Jesus already endured that punishment for you. You can have the peace that comes from knowing that Jesus is preparing an eternal home for you in heaven.

Life may not immediately go how we want it to. But you can sleep at night, knowing that you're in God's hands, that He loves you so much that He sent His Son to die to grant you eternal life, and knowing that that Son, Jesus, is no longer dead. He is risen, and He is ruling over His creation using His almighty power to direct everything in the world to get you safely to that eternal life. So sleep well tonight knowing this truth: That Jesus came into this world to make you good with God, that He finished that work on the cross, and that He rose again to prove that He has the authority to declare to you: **Peace be with you.** Amen.