

The Holy Gospel for April 19, the Second Sunday of Easter

John 20:19-31

¹⁹On 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!" ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

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

²⁴Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵So 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."

²⁶A 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!" ²⁷Then 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."

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

²⁹Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." New International Version (NIV)

The Epistle Reading for the Second Sunday of Easter

Acts 2:22-24

Peter continuing his sermon on the Day of Pentecost: ²²"Fellow Israelites, 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.

²³This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.

²⁴But 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. (NIV)

All of downcast disciples had been shattered by the horrendous defeat and shameful execution of Jesus of Nazareth. They had been certain that he was the long-awaited Messiah who would finally set them free from the Roman occupation and re-establish the Jewish nation.

Then while their hearts were still bleeding and raw, Jesus suddenly appeared in the room with them, displaying his healed but scarred hands and side as proof that it was indeed true that his death had not been the end but a new beginning!

One of the disciples was not there that night. But when they next saw him, they could hardly make themselves understood because of their excitement. They must have been at least a little disappointed when he argued that their experience could not have been real! Thomas declared that he was not so easily persuaded. He would have to see and feel for himself! If we honestly put ourselves into their sandals, no doubt there would be some among us who might have sided with the skeptical Thomas.

When we jump forward in the narrative to the story of the Day of Pentecost in the 2nd chapter of Acts, all of the disciples have been taught by Jesus himself exactly what God had been doing in the life, death, and resurrection of his Son Jesus the Christ. As Peter, the spokesperson for the group explains: "... God raised him (*Jesus*) from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. " God Almighty had planned for the Messiah to do much more than free some people from oppression in this life – He had planned that Death itself would be defeated along with all of the forces that struggle against God's ultimate goal to bring His creation back to the perfection that he had established at the beginning!

I hope that by next week, we will be able to have an audible sermon in the place of this written message, because I would love to lead you in singing the masterful hymn by Robert Lowry from 1874. It does not appear in the Lutheran Book of Worship, but it is included in both of the Sunday School Hymnals that still are available at Ground Oak and Mount Zion. To quote from The One Year Book of Hymns: "It's hard to match this hymn for sheer drama. The first stanza begins dismally, then strikes a note of hope, and then the chorus explodes with joy. The music itself come rising up from the depths and celebrates on high." (*From April 9 entry*)

1. Low in the grave He lay, Jesus, my Savior!

Waiting the coming day, Jesus my Lord!

Up from the grave He arose,

With a mighty triumph o'er His foes;

He arose a Victor from the dark domain,

And He lives forever with His Saints to reign,

He arose! He arose!

Hallelujah! Christ arose!

2. Vainly they watch His bed, Jesus my Savior!

Vainly they seal the dead, Jesus my Lord!

Chorus

3. Death cannot keep his prey, Jesus my Savior!

He tore the bars away, Jesus my Lord!

Chorus

May the explosive good news of the resurrection enliven and sustain us in the days ahead until we are able once again to lift our voices together in praise and adoration of our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ. Amen!

Pastor Dave