

Quasimodo Geniti

St. John 20.19-31

April 19, 2020

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

“Lord, by this time he stinketh.” That’s what Martha, the sister of Lazarus, said about her brother. Lazarus had been dead and buried four days. **“Lord, by this time he stinketh.”** It’s understandable. Jesus had just ordered the stone to be taken away from Lazarus’s tomb. But consider: Jesus had just said to Martha, **“I am the resurrection and the life; he that believes in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?”** Mary had responded, **“Yes, Lord: I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God.”** But now she says: **“Lord, by this time he stinketh.”**

People find it easy to believe in a “spirit-heaven,” a “Better Place” for the soul. But that’s not what the Christian Faith presents as our hope: **“I look for the resurrection of the dead.”**

Lazarus did come forth, at the Word and command of Jesus. Who was there? Who witnessed it? Thomas did. When Jesus announced that Lazarus was dead, but He was going to Judea to the home of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha, the disciples tried to prevent Him. **“Rabbi,”** they said to Jesus, **“lately the Jews sought to stone You, and are You going there again?”** Then Thomas, bold Thomas, said to his fellow-disciples, **“Let us also go, that we may die with Him.”**

Where is that confidence now? Thomas was willing to die with Jesus. Then he saw Lazarus raised from the dead. Is it so surprising that the Jesus who summoned from the sepulcher the malodorous body of Lazarus should Himself rise again?

But it took everyone by surprise. It shouldn’t have. They had the prophecies, including that of the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel.

Ezekiel, in today's Old Testament reading, sees a vision. He sees the Israeli army destroyed. Their corpses fill a valley with bones. This is the true vision of the world: a valley of the shadow of death, a place of deep darkness and despair. **"Son of man, can these bones live?"** Maybe the former occupier of the bones is in a so-called better place - but what about the bones, the bodies? Can these bones live? The only answer can be, "No." How can the dead be raised? How can a world of brokenness be fixed? How can a world of violence obtain peace? How can a world of contagion find health? In Ezekiel we hear the people say, **"Our hope is lost."**

Is that how you've been feeling? Are you a people with no hope, with no peace? Echoing through quarantined homes are discontented words: gossip; anger; worry; slander; spouses without respect for each other; brothers and sisters in Christ who harbor grudges. And the doors are closed for fear.

Gathered in the same place where Jesus had instituted His Supper the previous Thursday before—in that same place are the disciples gathered again, without hope, without peace.

They had heard Jesus was risen from the dead – but they did not believe the Word. Faith lives and grows by the Word; apart from the Word, faith starves. So the theme for this day, and the focus of our life, rings out in the Introit: **"As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the Word."** The world cannot give you peace. It is only found in the Word.

Have you been desiring peace in places where it cannot be found? We look for it within, but it is not there. We look for it in substances, drugs, food, alcohol, but it is not there. We look for it in relationships, but in this world they are temporary and dying. We look for peace in retribution, or money, or music, or TV, but all these are fleeting, and leave us empty.

But the first words of the risen Jesus spoken to His disciples are, **“Peace be with you.”** And then He says it again: **“Peace to you!”**, spoken as He shows them His hands and His side. What is He saying to them? “Here, in My wounds, are the things that make for your peace.”

“But I haven’t seen those wounds,” you say. St. John’s epistle points our faith to what flowed out of those wounds, what came from the pierced side of Christ – the water and the blood. Faith lives in being a child of God, washed clean in the water of Baptism. Faith is sustained by drinking the cup of salvation, His blood of the New Testament.

And faith lives by praying the prayer that we prayed today: *“As You have brought us to celebrate the festival of the Lord’s resurrection, cause us to bring forth the fruits thereof in our life and conduct.”* A living faith seeks to produce a godly life, holy conversation, conduct that spurns sin.

You can stop unfruitful quest for the world’s fleeting peace. Faith finds in Jesus’ wounds comfort and peace. **“Jesus came and stood in the midst [of the disciples], and said ... ‘Peace be with you.’ [And] He showed them His hands and His side.”** In Christ’s wounds is your peace – He has taken on your sins, your fears, your failures. He has redeemed you. In Jesus Christ you have peace – that is His Word of Gospel to you today, and every day – **“Peace be with you.”** It is as though He says to you, “Be troubled no more by your failures, your sins, your death. In Me they have died, and I will raise you up.”

All this world finally leaves you with is saying, **“Our hope is lost”**; or, **“Lord, by this time he stinketh.”** But to you the Spirit preaches the Word of the risen Jesus, **“Peace be with you.”** And faith says simply, **“Amen.”** ✠INJ✠

The Peace of Christ that passes all understanding keep your minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting.