



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

May 1, 2011
2nd Sunday after Easter
Sermon Text: : [John 20:19-31](#)
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Acts 10:34a, 36, 39-43](#)
Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 16](#)
Second Lesson: [1 Peter 1:3-9](#)
Gospel Lesson: [John 20:19-31](#)

Peace Be With You

Believe it
Proclaim it

Have you ever heard of cortisol? Do you know what cortisol is? It's a hormone that is released in the body as a stress reaction, the fright or flight kind of thing. But when you have chronic stress and too much of this released in your body and it's always there, it creates problems. I looked on the internet yesterday. They have all these lists of all these problems. It creates high blood pressure. It creates blood sugar problems. It creates impaired cognitive performance, an increase in bone density and muscle tissue. It does all kinds of things. That's one of the things they talk about with chronic stress, that this hormone that's released causes a lot of problems. So you need to reduce your stress levels. So at the bottom of the page, there are 10-11 links you can click on all different ways to relieve your stress. Not a single one of them mentions the way that Jesus mentions today.

I have to believe that cortisol levels were pretty high in that Upper Room that first Easter evening, don't you think? They had just seen Jesus arrested in front of them. They had fled for their lives. They had seen Jesus beaten. They had seen him crucified. They had seen him buried. Some of them had even been out there and seen the tomb was empty and heard these stories going around town about how they stole the body. They had to be wondering if the next knock on the door was going to be the leaders of the Jews to arrest them for stealing the body to say that Jesus had risen. You have to believe that if you could smell cortisol, you could smell it in that room.

When Jesus comes to them as they are living in the midst of this stress, he greets them with the phrase, "Peace be with you." I don't think it's just the common greeting. I think he's trying to teach them that true peace is found because he has risen from the dead. True peace is found because there is now peace between God and man. What God demands of us, a holy and perfect life that you and I could never give to him, Jesus completed in our place. The punishment that our sins deserve, separation from God, Jesus went through for us on the cross, which led him to scream out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

The Holy Spirit later had one of the apostles write to tell us he was put to death for our sins, and he was raised to life for our justification, so that we would know we have been declared not guilty. That's the peace he's talking about. He's talking about a clear conscience. Not the peace of a sleeping conscience or the peace of a numb

conscience or the peace of an ignored conscience. He's telling us that because he lived and died in our place, we are forgiven through faith and heaven is open to us, and we now are at peace with God. So "Peace be with you," Jesus says.

It's something that we need to believe, because human reason says it can't be that easy, just like human reason told Thomas he can't really be risen. It's something that we need to believe, and that is a power that is given to us outside of ourselves.

What does it say in Hebrews? "Faith is being sure of what we can't see." If you can see something, then it's not a matter of faith. It's not a matter of belief. If you are still awake and you can see me, it's not a matter of faith that I'm wearing a white gown this morning, is it? You can see it. That's not a matter of faith. For the disciples that first night, those that were there knew that Jesus was risen from the dead because they had seen him. It wasn't a matter of faith.

A week later, they still were pretty worried. Those cortisol levels still had to be kind of high because they were still together with the doors locked because they were probably still afraid. I don't know if they fully understood the peace that Jesus was talking about until 43 days later, after that second week, when the Holy Spirit was poured out on their hearts on Pentecost. And then Peter got up and he preached, and the rest of them got up and spoke in languages they didn't know and told others that the peace they needed to believe was that Jesus was the Messiah, that he takes away sin, that he opens heaven to those who believe that Jesus is their Savior.

The Spirit leads us to believe what we ourselves can't see. That's why Jesus said, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe," because it's a gift that has been given to them. By nature we are all spiritually dead. We have no spiritual ability. We can't decide to believe in Jesus. It has to be something that he gives to us. He gives it to us through the water and the Word at our Baptism. He gives it to us through the Word. He strengthens it in us in the Sacrament. This is what our God does for us. He gives us the gift of perfection he demands of us. He gives us the gift of faith which makes this perfection and this payment of Jesus and the blessings it won ours. This is why we can be completely at peace, because it's not a matter of our effort. It's not a matter of what we do. It's a matter of what God has done.

We don't pay for a single one of our sins. He's done it all. He's done absolutely every bit of it. He simply says to us through the power of the Spirit, "Believe this is yours and then rejoice in it." He also tells us to proclaim it. Did you see what he did that first night when he came to those apostles? It says he breathed on them. In Aramaic the word for "breath" is the same as the word for "spirit." He breathed on them and said "Receive the Holy Spirit." It was a visual lesson in a sense for them. He was imparting to them the gift of the Holy Spirit. He says, "Here's the gift that you have. If you forgive anyone their sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

We call this the Ministry of the Keys, the binding key. Literally he doesn't say if you do not forgive them. Literally he says if you retain their sins to them or kind of lock their

sins to them and the door to heaven is locked to them, they are not forgiven. And if you loose, the loose-ing key we talk about as if you forgive their sins, their sins are forgiven. This is the power that God has entrusted to us. It's a power that he wants us to use the way he wants us to use it.

When he tells us, "If you forgive sins, they are forgiven. If you don't forgive them, they're not forgiven," he tells us it has to be on the basis that he has taught us. Through faith in Jesus, there is forgiveness. If there is not faith in Jesus and if you give evidence that your faith has been choked out because you are not repenting of a sin, you are clinging to that sin and you're not turning away from it, then he tells us to announce to that person when it becomes obvious that they've become obstinate in their sin that their sins are not forgiven. That's the basis on which he tells us to do it.

This is where it gets tough. Let's say you're my relative, you're my brother, you're my sister. I can't go to my sister (I hope she doesn't listen to this on the internet and think I'm really talking about her); I can't go to my sister and say, "I know what you're doing is wrong before God but because you're my sister and I love you, you're forgiven. It doesn't matter if you are looking to Christ. It doesn't matter if you are clinging to your sin." I can't do that. God hasn't given me that right.

I can't go to my sister and say, "Because you're my sister and you picked on me too much when I was little, I don't like you and I'm not going to forgive you." It has to be on the basis of what God has said. It can't be on the basis of my like or dislike of someone else or my feelings toward that other person. It has to be on the basis of what God has said.

Think about that. One of the things I think we miss out on...did you ever tell your child who had done something wrong to go and say to that person, "I'm sorry"? They go and say it to an adult and the adult says to them, "That's alright." If it was alright, why did they have to go tell you they were sorry? God has given to us a greater power than "It's alright." He's given us the power to say "I forgive you and so does your God, and so does Jesus." So that peace between us and God is reestablished.

How many times in your life have you said to someone "I'm sorry" and they have said back to you, "I forgive you and so does Jesus"? Do you hear that often? I do. My wife says it to me all the time. But isn't that a great reminder when you add on that last phrase, "and so does Jesus"? That's the power God has given to us. That's the power of the Ministry of the Keys that we have. That's what he wants us to proclaim. Don't be troubled. Don't be burdened with guilt. Don't be filled with cortisol and the stress of your guilt because Jesus lived and died to take away your sins. You are at peace with him because he did it for you. That's the message we have to proclaim to each other. Lord knows you and I need to hear it over and over and over again. We have a sinful nature that is pretty thickheaded. You and I need to be assured that we are forgiven and that we are at peace with God.

This is the greatest treasure that we have. As we face life's challenges and we face life's difficulties, there are so many things we can't do on our own. But there is one thing we never have to worry about...we never have to worry about whether we are at peace with God because God himself has told us the answer is "Yes. I have taken away your sins."