Text: John 20:19-31, Acts 5:12-32

**Introduction**

A little bit of a confession. I don’t really like this 2nd Sunday of Easter. What I don’t like about it is how I think the church has spent way too much time in recent decades pondering or glorifying doubt. And Thomas – the Sunday after the Victory Festival of Easter – centered it in ways that I don’t think the text supports at all.

Now I don’t mean to just waive it away as nothing. Dark Nights of the Soul are real and often necessary faith steps. You don’t get Luther or the vast majority of spiritual giants without them. You don’t get solid statements like the creeds without people striving to understand what is beyond us.

But if you want to ponder doubt, pick up Job, or Ecclesiastes, or Paul pondering is fellow Jews in Romans. Thomas – the one week Easter Echo story – is about the mission of the church.

**Text**

Already on “the evening of that day, the first day of the week” Jesus makes it plain. He shows up among his disciples and wishes the peace and shows them his hands and his side. These are the signs and wonders. These are the marks of the greatest miracle. You could say THE SIGN and WONDER. All of Jesus’ miracles before this, and the signs and wonder that “were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles” as our first lesson starts, all of these point at the resurrection. The Great Sign. The Sign that we have peace with God. That the cross is the accepted atonement.

And immediately Jesus gives those gathered apostles the mission of the church. And yes, if you follow Luke and the Church year, the fullness of this waits until Pentecost. But right now Jesus breathes on them and gives them the Holy Spirit.

And this is the first part of the mission of the church. It is to go out baptizing and teaching. And through that Word and Sacrament those who have ears to hear will receive the Holy Spirit. As Luther would say in the catechism, “the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel and enlightened me with his gifts.” And the means of that Holy Spirit are the Word and the Sacraments. This is what Jesus is charging those Apostles to do. “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” Jesus came proclaiming the Kingdom, and not they are to go proclaiming the Kingdom. And that mission of the Kingdom has not changed. We proclaim “the peace of God be with you, receive the Holy Spirit.”

But the immediate next question might be what is the specific content of mission. What does peace with God and the reception of the Holy Spirit mean? Because different philosophies and religions might have different answers. If you were a stoic, peace with God might simply mean acceptance of fate. This has all happened before. It will happen again. Peace is in not being disturbed by the ups and downs of fate and fortune. But no stoic even claimed to preach the gospel – to bring good news. I’ve often thought of Buddhism and Eastern Stoicism with the added benefit that if you can detach yourself from wanting – if you can accept non-existence – then you can escape fate. Peace is nirvana, which is non-existence. There is no self.

**Christology**

Now I could keep going through the worlds answers. But none of them are really good news. Or they are news so fantastic – like you too will get your own universe – they might as well be the big rock candy mountain. But Jesus gives to those apostles the keys, the content of the mission, what Peace with God means. Your sins are forgiven. The good news of Jesus Christ is that all of our mistakes – the small ones we might not even recognize and the large ones we might still ponder decades later – every time we missed the mark. Every time we turned away from love. Your sins are forgiven.

Jesus paid for them. That cross made atonement. He is risen as THE SIGN and WONDER to prove this. Even better than telling the crippled man to take up his mat and walk as proof that the Son of Man could forgive sins. Here is the proof that all our sins are paid for. He is risen as proof that the Spirit is his to send. He is risen as proof that there is a new creation and that this old creation has no hold on those in him. He can walk through locked doors. Holes in the hands and side are not moral wounds. But beautiful mysteries.

**Moral**

That is the primary mission of the church. To proclaim through Word and Sacrament that your sins are forgiven.

In that first reading from Acts that’s what you find the apostle’s doing. And the world does what it has always tried to do to the church on mission – tell it to shut up. But the angle comes and frees them and tells them what they need to be doing. “Go and preach to the people all the words of this Life.” And that’s what they do. Which causes the great confrontation. The priests come out and in fear yell at them “you intend to bring this man’s blood up us.”

Now the truth is that this mans blood was already upon them. The blood of Christ is upon all sinners. The question is what it is there for. Does the blood of Christ testify against us as faithless. Or are we faithful? Peter presses the priests, “God exalted Jesus…to give repentance and forgiveness of sins.” Even you Caiaphas. (Now I don’t know if it was Caiaphas, but that would be a great story.) Even you Sanhedrin. Who conspired against Jesus and paid his betrayer and handed him over to Pilate. All these things were “to give repentance and forgiveness.” To Israel. To You. And we are witnesses to these things – we’ve seen the resurrection, we’ve seen the nail marks – and so is the Holy Spirit – which we have received and are proclaiming to you. These are for you and for all “whom God have given to those who obey him.”

They do the same thing to Thomas. “We’ve seen him.” And they obviously do it enough that Thomas gets tired of it.

But the lesson isn’t a valorization of Thomas’ doubt. Exactly the opposite. Jesus’ words are in that loving chiding way. “Stop being faithless and believe.” Thomas. Have you not been with these 10 enough to know that they aren’t lying? You have more than enough proof. I’ll show you, but really. You have no good reason to doubt.

And Jesus blesses the mission of the church right down to us. “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” We might not see the nail marks. The risen Christ might not appear to us “with eyes of flame and feet of burnished bronze and a voice like the roar of many waters.” But the risen Christ is here. In Word and Sacrament. We have the Holy Spirit who testifies. We have the forgiveness of sins. And He is risen. Stop playing around with foolishness and believe.

Because you’ve got a mission.

**Eschatological**

That’s kinda John’s first ending. He won’t be able to leave it here. He will add another chapter. But he ends with the summary, “Jesus did many other signs which are not written, but these are written that you might believe.”

Look at the history of the church. We don’t have everything. Not every saint has had their works recorded. Not every sign and wonder done is known to us – although they are certainly known to God. But the church has recorded these. We have the gospels. We have the apostolic witness. And we have a long history of saints and martyrs, preachers and teachers, that all have proclaimed “He’s Risen” Your sins are forgiven. Believe.

He’s has the keys of Death and Hades. And that one says to you, “Fear not.”

Those keys he has used for your salvation.