

The Second Sunday of Easter
April 19, 2020

“Clearing the Air of All Doubt!” John 20:22-23
By Rev. Ed Weber

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior the risen Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this Second Sunday in Easter is from our Gospel reading, John 20:22-23

22 And when He had said this, He breathed on *them*, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the *sins* of any, they are retained.”

Here ends our text.

I. Doubt and fear were/are thick in the air

Ever heard anyone say, “It’s time to clear the air”. Basically, it’s time to speak frankly is what the person is saying...it’s time to clear the air of any misunderstandings, any grievances or ill feelings. It’s time to set the record straight and get on with it, because if not, a cloud of mistrust and doubt is going to hang over everyone and the work at hand will continue to be bogged down. It’s better to make sure everyone is working together on the same page! It’s time to just clear the air!

Well, Sunday morning, Easter morning that is, the work of the early church was more than just bogged down. It was in a full-fledged lock down. No one was compelling the disciples to shelter-in-place. They were huddled inside out of fear. There was no Savior, no church work happening...only fear and doubt. For three years they had lived at Jesus’ side, hearing His words, and seeing His miracles. And now all of that seemed like a distant and unreal memory. They had put their trust in Jesus and now He was dead. The air was thick with doubt and fear! You can imagine their despair, their pacing back and forth, jumping at the slightest sound that could be the arrival of soldiers. The air needed to be cleared!

Are you living right now under a cloud of doubt and fear? Has this Covid-19 epidemic overwhelmed you so much that you’re having trouble remembering better days when you weren’t shut-in your homes? When you were living a life without fear?... at least without the fear of dying by a handshake or someone’s sneeze, that is?

I've heard of some people using their down time to sort through family pictures and organize them. It's a fun experience to remember the moments in life that were celebrated without this thick cloud of Covid-19 hanging over our heads. Many are posting pictures from the past on Facebook. It reminds us of the blessings we've enjoyed from God in the past when we were Covid free. It's our prayer to God, to live life now, free without fear, even in the midst of this disease. We pray to God to clear our air of all doubt and fear!

Well, the disciples' doubts weren't at all removed, however, when the women came back from the tomb and said that it was empty, and Jesus was alive. Luke 24 tells us that their words seemed like idle tales. Doubt is so all encompassing in our sinful human nature. We would rather continue believing bad news than believe someone's good news. Maybe it's because each of us has been burned too many times by the charlatans of this world who promise something good but never deliver.

"I'll believe it when I see it!" Maybe you heard someone say that phrase when it was first announced by President Trump that each parent with a S.S. number would get a \$1200 stimulus check, and each child \$500. Sounded too good to be true. Maybe it was **you** who doubted. And then low and behold, you started hearing that people were getting deposits just this past week and you went to check your account and it had some stimulus funds! Wow, I guess I shouldn't have doubted, you may have muttered to yourself.

But still, everyone has different predictions about when this Corona Virus epidemic will be over. Who can you believe? Can you believe the political leaders in New York who said don't worry, it's no worse than a common cold? Can you believe a leading doctor who said in March that it was ok to go on a cruise if you want? Or the doctors who said that you don't have to wear masks, but now you do? Or the politicians that said this will be over by Easter? ...so much back tracking going on...who do you believe?

The problem is that no one has any definitive answers, and everyone is giving their best guess, because this is a NEW corona virus that we're dealing with. Everyone is trying to understand it, how it's being transmitted, and why it affects some people worse than others. So many unanswered questions...where did this all start? Was there a cover up in China because the virus accidentally leaked out of their biosafety level 4 laboratory? Who do you believe?

And then comes the troubling news out of South Korea that some patients who recovered from the Covid-19 disease are testing positive again. Is it possible to be re-infected? Can the virus re-activate itself? Were the tests themselves faulty? Who can you believe? Have you become a serial doubter of anything and everything related to Covid-19?

In some way, I think we can all identify with the thick cloud of gloom and despair on that first Easter day. Do you sometimes catch yourself with your head down like the two disciples who were walking down the road to Emmaus? We'll hear that story in a few weeks. Can you relate to the disciples in the locked room who cast aside the good news from the women as just idle tales? And can you identify with Thomas' that he wouldn't believe unless he touched the risen Lord....Doubting Thomas.

II. Jesus' breath fills the air with forgiveness and life, both then and now

Yes, while we are often skeptics of man's word, God's word is completely different. It is completely reliable. Remember how Jesus Himself told His disciples on the very road to His death in Jerusalem...

“they will mock Him, and scourge Him, and spit on Him, and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again.”

How could they forget something so detailed and so recent? Jesus predicted His death and it happened just as He said. He also, however predicted His resurrection. How could they forget this and doubt it when it's news reached their very ears?

Are you any different? Have doubts entered your mind about whether God is going to help you through this epidemic? Do you ask yourself “What if I were to get infected and not recover? Is there really eternal life after death? Can I truly trust God's word?”

Absolutely! Absolutely! Without a doubt! Because it is God's word and God never lies!

The last two verses of today's Gospel (John 20:30-31) clear the air of doubt: **“truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.**

Jesus rose from the dead! And so, His word can be trusted 100% He was seen alive by the women, the disciples and even Thomas! Jesus loved His brothers and sisters so much that He made sure that all doubt and despair were dispelled with the Good News...He is risen! Jesus gave the message in person!

It was time to clear the air of all doubt and fear! It was time to have a frank talk about the disciples' weak faith, and frankly...our weak faith! And with one word, the word "peace", uttered from Jesus' lips, fear left the room! Death was not the victor, but Jesus was! And He brings the fruits of His victory with Him. ...peace...peace from the wrath of God ...peace instead of condemnation for our sin. The outstretched resurrected nail printed hands are the proof!

Let's clear the air of all doubt because it's time to get a move on. The church has much to do. No sooner did Jesus remove their doubts with His word of peace than He sent His church WITH His Word of peace!!!

"Peace to you!" Jesus repeats.
"As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." (John 20:21)

Jesus removes all doubt and fear with the truth of His resurrection in order to send forth His people without doubt and fear. Having unlocked their hearts with the good news of salvation, Jesus sends forth His people from their locked homes to the world still cowering in fear! God is sending you, dear brother and sister in Christ, because you believe the Good News of the resurrection! You have come to know who you can believe 100% by the power of the Holy Spirit! Jesus wants you to tell others where they can also find peace for their hearts... where the air of sin and doubt is cleared... where eyes of faith see the nail scarred hands of Jesus and know the peace of His death and His resurrection!

Let's clear the air once again, and make sure you understand that you are not being sent empty handed. You've got plenty of PPE in stock. You've got plenty of Personal Protective Equipment. No, I'm not talking about masks and gloves and gowns...I'm talking about what Jesus gives you. Let's especially clear the air about this so there can be no doubts! For Jesus did something very special! He filled the air of the disciples' despair with His breath of life and breathed on the disciples.

“Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the *sins* of any, they are retained.”

And that’s the ventilator of life that He gives to His church! Yes, church of God, Jesus gives **you**, also, the power of the keys...to unlock heaven and lock heaven by your word of forgiveness or your retention of forgiveness. This is your Easter basket filled with riches more precious than gold!

Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit upon the disciples and the same Holy Spirit is breathed upon a sinner in baptism. You who believe and are baptized have the power to forgive one another and are called to use this power daily with one another...not just 7 times but 70 x7 ...unlimited times!

As you’ve been sheltered-in-place now for several weeks, has there not been a need to clear the air among each other in your family... to offer apologies and then breathe the life of forgiveness upon each other? Yes, that is why Jesus gave His people this great gift...to use it! It’s your PPE...your personal protection equipment from sin, death and the devil!

Indeed, this was not the first time that Jesus had told His church about the gift of the keys of forgiveness. In Matthew 18 He instructed His church...

¹⁸ “Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

¹⁹ “Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”

...two or three are gathered in My name, any two or three Christians gathered have the power of the keys among them and Jesus is in the midst of them.

And this is how you and I are sent...forgiven children of God, to now proclaim God’s forgiveness to the world. This is God’s stimulus plan for the church. Jesus deposits unlimited funds of forgiveness in your soul for you to also use with another. That’s how the church gets back on its feet and out the locked door! God is strengthening you right now in your homes! That’s how the church becomes vibrant and healthy without fear...trusting in the words of the Risen Lord who conquered all sin and death and gives His church this peace!

So, again, who do you believe? We've heard many so-called authorities get it wrong. Man's predictions don't always come true. Once in a while they do... I'll tell you a quick story about my young nephew who just started H.S. Aside from his school work, he devoutly keeps up with all the news in the U.S. and worldwide. Back in January, he begged his mother to take him to the local hardware store. Why? Because he saw what was going on in China he pleaded with her to go could buy some N95 masks for the family. Well, the first case wasn't detected in the U.S. until January 19th. My sister-in-law probably doubted that there would ever be a need, but she took my nephew to the hardware store anyways. Of course, all the shelves had plenty of masks in stock at the time. And it was a good thing too, as we all know. Well, he also sent one mask to his grandma, my mom, so that she could be protected when she goes out to the grocery store. Thanks be to God!

Sometimes man's word gets it right, by God's providence, that is, as in my nephew's case, but often times there's a lot of backtracking. But the word of the Son of Man can always be trusted! Jesus predicted His death and resurrection and proved that His word was true by rising from the grave!

“And these things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.”

Jesus has cleared the air in heaven of every sickness, every sin, every disease and death itself. As we look forward to our resurrected Lord's final coming, He clears our earthly air of all doubt and fear with His word of peace, forgiveness and eternal life! Jesus has stocked His shelves full of salvation for every sinner. He has prepared the banquet feast and invites every sinner to come for all is ready! (Matthew 22:4)

As He said to Thomas, Jesus says to each of us. “Don't be unbelieving, but believing!” (John 20:27) To which, every believer, responds with Thomas, with great joy by the power of the Holy Spirit, “My Lord and My God!”

Yes! “Blessed are you who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:29) Yes! Breathe in the Spirit's life giving air of the Gospel and breathe it out to the world! That He is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.

“The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Galatians 4:7)