

DON'T HOPE FOR PEACE

Pastor Colin Rieke ~ April 3, 2016



¹⁹ On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." ²² And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not

forgive them, they are not forgiven." ²⁴ Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵ So 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 it." ²⁶ A 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!" ²⁷ Then 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." ²⁸ Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹ Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." ³⁰ Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹ But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Grace and peace to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,

What are some things that you hope for? What are some dreams or goals that you have? A student hopes he can make it through the rest of the school year. A beautiful young maiden hopes she can find the man of her dreams. Some of you may be hoping you can make it to retirement with enough money to live out the rest of your days. After last week in the Rieke family, I am just hoping that everybody recovers from their sicknesses.

Those are hopes for this life. Some of them short-term, others of them are longer term. But people hope for things beyond this life too. A common one, is hoping there is a heaven and hoping that they'll get there one day. If "hope" is one side of the coin, then "doubt" would be the other. If someone is hoping for something to happen, they aren't sure, because there may be a possibility it doesn't happen.

But when it comes to our eternal salvation, when it comes to spending eternity in heaven with God, Jesus doesn't just want us to hope that we'll get there. He wants us to know. In fact it was for this very reason that he met with his disciples in a locked upper room on the first two Sundays after he rose from the dead. It was because he didn't want them or us to HOPE FOR PEACE, but to know it.

1. To let go of sins
2. To let go of doubt

(1)

If we think that we have it tough in our life, we just need to look at Jesus' disciples. There they were, gathering together behind locked doors, terrified of what the Jewish leaders might do next. They had heard from the women that Jesus' body was no longer in the tomb where they laid him, some even claimed to see him alive. But in the paranoid state of their minds, they thought the Jewish leaders thought they had stolen the body. Even if they didn't think that, what would stop them from searching them out and killing them just like they had killed Jesus.

Humanly speaking, they had every reason to be afraid. At this point, they were just hoping that they could get through the night. The last 24 hours had been a blur, they were still trying to figure out what had really happened to Jesus. When all of a sudden, **"Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!'"** Unlike when he walked to Emmaus with two of his disciples, Jesus was instantly recognizable to his disciples in this locked room. Using his glorified body, he passed through the locked doors and appeared with his disciples.

What exactly was his glorified body like? We know that it was still a physical body, because he ate with them and it still had the marks from his crucifixion. But this body also was able to do non-physical things – like getting out of a sealed tomb and getting into a locked room. This body of his would also ascend into heaven 50 days following his resurrection. It is for these reasons we call it a glorified body. It was with this glorified body that Jesus appeared to his disciples and said, **"Peace be with you."**

"Peace be with you," was a common greeting among the Jews, but Jesus did not just come to say, "Hi!" to his buddies. He came to give them peace. For you or I, this is not possible. I can say, "I hope you have peace in your household this week" or "I hope you get home safely after church," but I have no power to control anything actually happening or not happening. But with Jesus, he did, he had the power to control what he was giving them. **"DON'T HOPE FOR PEACE"** Jesus was saying, **"KNOW PEACE."** And he explained what he meant with his next words.

"As the Father has sent me, I am sending you. And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.'" The first thing we need to understand is what Jesus is talking about when he is talking about peace. While the disciples were concerned about their physical well-being from the Jewish leaders, Jesus had something else in mind. That's what he meant with those first words, **"As the Father has sent me."** Why did the Father send Jesus? We know he sent Jesus to live and die to save us from our sins. This is the peace that Jesus is talking about. He's talking about a peace with God. A peace that we can only have with the removal of sins. This is what Jesus' resurrection was all about, it was to prove that God has let go of our sins.

Jesus didn't want his disciples to **HOPE FOR PEACE** with God, he wanted them to know peace with God, and so that's why he said, **"Peace be with you."** But he didn't stop there. He didn't just want his

disciples to HOPE FOR PEACE, but to know peace. And he didn't just want them to be satisfied with knowing peace but sharing peace, which is the thrust of that next sentence. **"If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."** What an important task Jesus has given his followers, a task that should not be taken lightly.

Sometimes as Christians, we can get a little timid about this verse by saying, "Well, I can't tell someone their sins are forgiven or their sins aren't forgiven, only God can do that." While that's true, Jesus delegates this responsibility to his followers. In fact, this is what we do when we proclaim to people God's Word. And while we may not be able to look inside a person's heart, we can, based on their actions or lack of actions, based on their confession or lack of confession, proclaim a forgiving of sins, a letting go of them, or we can proclaim that their sins are still bound to them.

When we do this, we do not take the place of God, but we act as God's representatives, and on the basis of God's Word we can proclaim or withhold forgiveness to someone. This is one reason why at Grace Lutheran Church we begin every service with a confession of sins. After hearing your confession, I as a called servant of this congregation, pronounce the forgiveness of sins. I don't pronounce on my own authority, but on the authority of Jesus, the one who died and rose from the dead, the one who met with the disciples in the locked room, the one who wanted to give them certainty of sins forgiven. **"DON'T HOPE FOR PEACE"** he said, **"KNOW PEACE."** KNOW PEACE in a letting go of sins that Christ has paid for, this is a certainty both for you and for those you share it with.

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It was this certain hope that Jesus' disciples had the opportunity to share with another member of their company, Thomas. Thomas was one of Jesus' original 12 disciples, but for some reason or another, he was not gathered with the others on the first night after Jesus' rose from the dead. The next morning, when the others found him, they shared with him what had happened the night before. Despite their insistence, he couldn't believe it, he wouldn't believe it. For this reason, he has gotten the pet name "Doubting Thomas."

But really, Thomas doubted no more than the other disciples. It took a visible appearance from Jesus for the other disciples to believe this truth, just as it would take for Thomas. Just imagine what that week would have been like for Thomas. He had heard from many around him about their experiences with the risen Christ, and yet, he had failed to see him, he wallowed in his doubt that entire week. This is probably what encouraged Thomas to be with the others whenever he could so that he might not miss out on anything special.

And a week later the disciples gathered together once more. This time Thomas was with them. Just like before, the doors were locked, and just like before, Jesus appeared among them. He once again said, **"Peace be with you!"** reminding them of the peace he was not just wishing them, but actually giving them. Then he turned to Thomas and said, **"Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side."** Thomas wanted proof, Jesus gave him proof. And then he said, **"Stop doubting and believe."** Literally Jesus was saying, let go of your doubt, let it just waft away in the wind.

That's easier said than done, isn't it? To just let go of your doubt. Instead, doubt just seems to cling to us, and in some ways we like it. Doubt is one of the devil's most powerful tools. Despite all God has said, and despite all God has done, doubt still creeps into our minds. Doubt tells us that God is holding back on his blessings to us, it tells us that my gifts aren't as special as someone else's gifts. Doubt tells us that God doesn't know what he's talking about when it comes to today's culture. Doubt tells us we need more proof from God before we believe him. Doubt tells us we must be doing something wrong if we aren't growing as a church as fast as we expect. But you know what? Our doubt is unreasonable. Just like it was unreasonable for Thomas to doubt that Jesus rose from the dead when everyone around him said it was true, it is unreasonable for us to doubt God.

We believe the Bible is true, and everything written in it is true. It has held up to the scrutiny from centuries of enemies trying to tear it down. And even though we have not seen Jesus in the flesh, God has given us ample evidence to believe without seeing. God has said his Word will work when and where he chooses. And the entire purpose of the Bible is summarized in the last verse we heard this morning from the gospel of John. **"These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."**

When you think about it, our doubts have no impact on God, only on us. But God doesn't want us to HOPE FOR PEACE, he wants us to know it, and when we know it we can let go of our doubts. For Christ has even overcome our doubts. We don't have to hope for peace, but we know we have peace. And this is the greatest gift we could receive from our God. And while our God has not come visibly to us like he did the disciples, he has still given us things we can see and touch to assure us of the peace that is ours.

He has given us his means of grace, the means by which he gives to us grace. Through baptism, he takes a creature dead in sin, and makes him alive in faith. Through the Lord's Supper, he gives to us the very body that died on the cross to assure us of heaven. Through his Word he reminds us of all he has done. This is why we encourage at Grace not only regular worship attendance but also Bible study. It isn't a way to boost numbers or offerings, but a way to boost faith. For without these means of grace, we deprive ourselves of the peace that God wants to give us.



The Means of Grace



Tradition says that Thomas took to heart Jesus' words, **"Stop doubting and believe."** Tradition says that Thomas became a great missionary, bringing the Word of God all the way to India. How's that for a guy who spent a week doubting the resurrection? Thomas didn't have to HOPE FOR PEACE, he KNEW PEACE, and he did everything he could to share it with others. Take the example of Thomas to heart, and believe the gift of peace Jesus gives you. DON'T HOPE FOR PEACE, KNOW PEACE. **"Stop doubting and believe!"** Amen.

*St. Thomas,
missionary*