

As soon as He rises from the dead Jesus offers the forgiveness of sins. He could offer anything. I suppose more people would come to Him if He offered something else. They ran after Him when He healed diseases or and tried to make Him their king when He fed them with bread and fish. And Lord now over everything – that is what He says about Himself, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me,” think what you could do if you had all power in heaven and on earth! He is Lord, His resurrection asserts it, Lord of everything, what could He *not* offer? An unlimited supply of money – like the jar of oil and the store of flour in Elijah’s time, that never ran out, this bottomless purse of money, that would get people to come! That would make Jesus popular! I am sure that it would make people happy! Or an endless supply of wine, the wedding at Cana constantly – He could give it. It would not deal with greed, with envy, with lust, with anger, with selfishness – in fact, it would make it all worse. It would not deal with your death or your relationship with God or the punishment of hell. Think on this. The Lord of the universe rises from the dead. Jesus could give anything – He is Lord over all. He gives the forgiveness of sins. It is what you need.

So learn to desire it, above everything. If you think you need something else, something more, and you are frustrated that Jesus does not give it,

consider that you are expecting the wrong things and torturing yourself about it, when the answer to your true good is right here in what Jesus gives. Everything else bad or useless or against God's will you will learn not to want in the end. Everything else good you can wait for and in the end Jesus will give it to you, whether in this life or the life to come, and you will enjoy it infinitely more when you know it is given by the God who absolutely adores you in your Savior Jesus – and this you know by the forgiveness of your sins.

So Jesus makes sure you will get the forgiveness of sins. This is the entire purpose of His coming into this World. Why did God become a Man? For this. It is why He lived, why He suffered, why He died, to speak those words to His disciples and for you to hear them today: Peace be to you. Whoever's sins you forgive they are forgiven, whoever sins you retain they are retained.

First, He assures you of the reality of this forgiveness. This is why He points to His hands and His side. It is why He tells Thomas to put his hand in His side and to put his fingers in the marks in His hands. So that when He says "Peace" it is not some meaningless greeting. No, this is real peace, peace with you, a sinner, with the God who cannot stand sin, the peace that Jesus' wounds testify to. The God-Man was wounded for your

transgressions, pierced for your iniquities. Those wounds testify what is real in heaven and on earth, God is appeased, all His anger gone, it has been exhausted, poured out completely and drunk to the bitter dregs by His Son. There is nothing left of it. Do not dare to think that some sin in your past is left unforgiven. Was Peter's denial too much for Jesus? Was Thomas' stubborn refusal to believe too much? Was Paul's murderous rampage against men and women and children who believed in Jesus too much? The reality is in the wounds Jesus bears, the reality is in the mouth that groaned tetelestai "It is finished" and now speaks peace with God, speaks forgiveness. You know how real the guilt of sin is, you know how real a burdened conscience is, so know the reality of forgiveness Jesus insists on when He shows the proof of it in His own risen body.

Jesus died for real sins and He gives forgiveness for real sins. Not fake sins. There are fake sins. The last year or so it seems to have become a sin to offend anyone. That is a fake sin. A sin our culture has just made up. And it has spread. This is what has allowed trans ideology to take over everywhere – let me give you an example of this: Sean Hannity, a self-described "conservative" and "Christian" refers to Bruce Jenner and Dylan Mulvaney as shes, when they are hes. Why? Because it is a fake sin to offend anyone ever. The real sin, of course, is to speak a lie and say that

what God created male is female. That is a real sin. Do not be sorry for fake sins. God, not the current culture, gets to tell you what is good and what is evil. The Roman Catholic Church tries to do this too – it is a sin not to fast on Fridays – what a silly fake sin. And this extends to people trying to say having a drink is a sin or enjoying a cigar is a sin or eating meat is a sin – no, you have real sins to worry about. Do not waste your time feeling bad about fake sins. Real sins, losing your temper with your wife or children, refusing to submit to your husband, envying those whom God has blessed with more or better things than you, holding grudges, lust, gossip, boredom with God’s Word, worry about money as if God will not provide for you, those are real sins that hurt you and hurt others and offend God, and Jesus died for those real sins and speaks real forgiveness for them here in His Church and unburdens you from their guilt by the power of His resurrection.

Jesus says, “Whosoever’s sins you forgive” “Whosoever’s sins you retain.” The “whosoever” is all-inclusive. We are not allowed to exclude ourselves.

The human race falls into two camps: those who receive forgiveness and those who do not. Jesus earned it for all, the entire human race, there is no distinction. And He wants all to hear His Gospel, again, without exception. But only some receive it. That is where the sad divide is. What

Jesus says constantly, Many are called but few are chosen. He says the same thing here. What He gives the Church to do, starting with His eleven apostles, but extending to the Church of all ages, down to us, what He gives us to do is forgive the sins of those who are sorry for their sins and want to do better and retain the sins of those who are not sorry and have no intention of reforming their lives.

This is why we exclude from the Church's fellowship men and women who are not sorry for their sins and make it public. Jesus tells us to. Whosoever's sins you retain they are retained. Those churches that tell the unrepentant sinner that he does not have to worry about it, that he can simply embrace his sin – whatever it is, greed, homosexuality, premarital or extramarital sex, refusal to attend church, holding grudges – those churches are directly disobeying the Lord Jesus and hardening sinners in their sin. Here is where the law of God has to be spoken without worry about offending – in fact the point is to offend, not by being mean or insulting or dismissive, but in love to point out sin that offends God and leads to death and hell, so that a sinner can repent, be sorry, sincerely desire forgiveness from God, and then receive what Jesus died in love to give. What a beautiful thing, that a sinner repent and receive forgiveness. The angels rejoice in

heaven every time it happens, and we the Church gain a brother, a sister, bound together by the love of Christ.

This is what the Church gives to all who repent. I speak it to you, and this is not by some Lutheran tradition, some Church tradition, that I stand in front of you and say, "I forgive you all your sins," no it is the command of Jesus – whosoever's sins you forgive they are forgiven. Jesus won that forgiveness on the cross, but He did not give it there. He gives it in Baptism, gives it in the words of absolution and preaching, seals it to you in the Lord's Supper, in the body and blood shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.

It is not that any Christian cannot give this forgiveness. He can. Or she can. When a Christian nurse sits by a suffering patient and encourages him, tells him about how God so loved the world that He sent His Son to live and die for us and conquer death, when she tells him to take heart, to think how God has suffered, how God has died, to comfort us in our suffering and give us life after death, she is delivering the same forgiveness that the pastor proclaims here in church. When the teacher or father or mother confronts a child who has just sinned and has been caught in it and is devastated, and teacher says or dad or mom says, your sin is gone, forgiven, washed away by Jesus' blood, erased from your God's sight, and so it is gone from mine,

do not worry, do not be sad anymore, that is the same forgiveness as is received at this table.

But Jesus told the Church to proclaim it publicly, and He did it as soon as He rose from the dead, because He wants His faithful to gather together and receive it every single week or more. This is what He has established His Church for. What He sends pastors to do.

There are many who object to this, that a pastor forgives sins. Only God forgives sins. A man cannot do it. Who does he think he is? He is a filthy sinner just as much as anyone else. That is the objection. And it is a strange one if you think about it. Imagine if we applied this to anything else that only God gives. Is your bodily life not a gift from God alone? But He very obviously gives it through parents. What about earthly peace? Is that not a gift from God alone? But He gives it through government. What about the food you eat? Do we not pray with the Psalmist, “The eyes of all look to You, O Lord, and you give them their food at the proper time, you open your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing”? But He gives it through the hard work of farmers and ranchers and hunters and gardeners. Are we going to say that the farmer cannot produce food, parents cannot conceive children, government cannot ward off an enemy, police cannot protect the innocent, because only God does all these things?

No, we are going to say with confidence that father and mother stand in God's place and raise children as God's representatives. And the government, as Romans 13 says very clearly, is God's minister to punish evil and reward good. And that the farmer plants and waters but God gives the increase. And this is exactly how the ministry of the Church works. God works here. He takes care of your bodily needs through government, through family, through your hard work and the hard work of many others – doctors, nurses, teachers, farmers, builders, lawyers. And He takes care of your spirit especially through His Church, through pastors whom He sends to say the words you hear and to distribute the body and blood in which you trust.

Thomas did not believe the word the disciples spoke to Him. They told him what Jesus said. They spoke the peace He spoke, they assured Him of the forgiveness He gave. He refused to accept it until He heard it from Jesus Himself. He is the example of what we are not to demand from our Lord. It would be like demanding that God drop food from heaven for you instead of using the agency of the farmer, or that He clean up crime in a neighborhood without using the police, or that He just drop a baby from the sky without using the union of mommy and daddy. The ministry of the Gospel is God's work among us, Jesus' work among us. The words you



hear spoken here are God's, the forgiveness you need and you hear is the forgiveness Jesus suffered and died to win for you, the forgiveness He is eager to give to you, so eager, that the first thing He does when He rises from the dead is to tell His apostles to preach it.

This eagerness of your Lord continues to this day. This is why, and there is no other reason for it, this is why the Christian Church still exists and thrives in this world and among us here at Zion Lutheran Church. This is the power of Christ's resurrection. He still speaks and the gates of Hell will not prevail against Him. He is risen from the dead and has all power. And He exercises this power so graciously and beautifully among us. This is the power of His resurrection. It is His declaration that He has won your peace with God (see it in His wounds), and it is His insistence that He is intent on giving this peace to you, speaking your forgiveness here, distributing it to you, putting it in your mouths in His body and blood, so that you have full assurance that His Father is your Father and His Spirit the Spirit by whom you live and by whom you cry out with Thomas, "My Lord and my God."

Alleluia. Christ is risen.