

## John 20:19–31

<sup>19</sup>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!" <sup>20</sup>After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

<sup>21</sup>Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." <sup>22</sup>And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup>If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

<sup>24</sup>Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup>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."

<sup>26</sup>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!" <sup>27</sup>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."

<sup>28</sup>Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

<sup>29</sup>Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

<sup>30</sup>Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. <sup>31</sup>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.

We've all heard echoes in large rooms or in the gymnasium or in big buildings. Perhaps you have also heard them outdoors, in hilly country or in a canyon. We shout out a few words and moments later the words come back to us. The sound is repeated. We also know from experience that those echoes are fainter and less clear than what was originally spoken. Echoes quickly fade away into silence.

Today is Easter 2, the second Sunday of the Easter season. We might say that the Sunday following Easter is the first echo of the celebration of Christ's resurrection—an echo repeated every following Sunday until we celebrate Easter again. But in all honesty today may seem like an empty echo compared to last Sunday. There are probably going to be fewer people gathered for worship today than gathered here a week ago. The choirs and the instruments that we enjoyed a week ago aren't going to be found in this Sunday service. You might be tempted to say, "Well, everything is back to normal." It's sort of, "ho hum, we have gone from extraordinary to ordinary." Despite appearances, this day is not ordinary. How can today be ordinary? The victory that Jesus won on the cross is never ordinary. Through his resurrection Jesus demonstrated God's power. Today that power is proclaimed again as Jesus appears to his disciples and as he comes to us in Word and Sacraments. This Sunday may be normal, but it isn't ordinary. Jesus is risen and he lives in and with us.

Unlike the echoes we hear in other places, Easter's echo does not grow fainter. On the contrary Easter's echo grows stronger, louder, and spreads further with every Alleluia. **"Easter is Still Echoing."** The celebration of Jesus' resurrection is being echoed this week. It is echoed every week. In our Gospel lesson we hear the first echo of Easter.

**"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!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord."**

Easter is echoing, but it wasn't echoing among the disciples on the evening of that first Easter Sunday. Although Jesus had risen from the dead, the Spirit of Pentecost had not yet strengthened the disciples. They were afraid of their enemies, so they stayed out of sight and hid behind locked doors. Oh, it is true they had heard the reports about Jesus having risen, but there were some doubts about what had been seen. In the garden Mary Magdalene thought Jesus might be the gardener. The woman had been nearly hysterical with grief. She saw him through a haze of tears in the "dawn's early light."

But the Emmaus disciples saw Jesus in broad daylight. They walked with him for miles, as he preached his sermon on the way. Yet they didn't recognize Jesus until he broke the bread and gave it to them – and they saw the holes in his hands.

And now Jesus appeared to all the disciples, except for Thomas, but it was late in the evening. The doors, and perhaps the windows, were shut for fear of the Jews. The room was lit only by lamps. In other words, the scene was emotional and the light was dim. Was this really Jesus? The Savior shows them his hands and his side. These wounds were the proof of his identity. And the disciples were filled with a greater joy than they had ever known.

Jesus comes to his disciples even though they have forgotten his promises and denied and deserted him. Easter is echoing in the physical presence of our risen Lord. The love of Jesus is evident as he speaks to them a word of peace and forgiveness. **“Again Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you! 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.’”**

Easter is echoing in the gracious words of Jesus who died for the forgiveness of sins and to make peace between God and humanity. Jesus breathes on them and gives them the Holy Spirit so they can forgive themselves and others. Easter is echoing in the power of God, which raised Jesus from the dead and which enables man to forgive sins. Jesus isn't giving us the power to legislate forgiveness. Rather Jesus gives us a commission to announce on earth what God has already decreed in heaven. The Savior here is clarifying what he had said earlier in Matthew 18. **“Whatever you forbid on earth must be what is already forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth must be what is already permitted in heaven”** (Charles B. Williams translation of Matthew 18:18).

Easter is echoing among the disciples, but remember, Thomas wasn't present on that first Easter eve. When his fellow disciples told Thomas, “We have seen the Lord!” he refused to believe 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.”** A week later we hear Easter's echo again. Jesus comes to Thomas the doubter, the denier, the weak of faith. Jesus comes to him even though Thomas will not believe what he cannot understand. Easter is echoing in Jesus' presence for such a weak believer. Thomas was the one who said, **“Let us go that we may die with him.”** He had faith, but the cross was such a shock that his faith was shaken. Severe tests can do that to the most faithful people. It can happen when bad news or difficulty catches us off guard.

Jesus tells Thomas not to rely on the foolishness of human wisdom and to deny his own strength and reason. He calls Thomas to believe on the basis of what is real rather than on what he perceives. Easter is echoing in the foolishness of God being wiser than the wisdom of man. Jesus calls Thomas to believe and empowers him to believe. Easter is echoing in death yielding to life.

Easter is still echoing among us. The first Easter took place almost 2,000 years ago, yet the echoes of Easter have not faded with the passage of centuries. No, the echo of Easter has actually grown louder and stronger through the ages. Why is the sound of Easter so strong? Because the Lord amplifies the message of Easter in so many ways.

Easter is echoing in God's Word. In the weakness of our human reason, when we are lost and confused, filled with doubt and unbelief, Jesus comes to us in his Word. The Word made flesh still dwells among us in the written and spoken Word. He is with us always according to his promise (Mt 28:20). Jesus' Word is living, active, and powerful. Jesus enables us. His Word still accomplishes what he purposes for it. His Word works faith. His Word brings forgiveness. Easter is echoing in our lives through God's life-changing, life-giving Word.

Likewise Easter is echoing in Baptism. In Baptism Jesus comes to us. While we were locked in sin and death, unable to come to him and unable to let him in, he came to us. In the Word joined to water, Jesus spoke to us, calling us from doubt and unbelief to faith. He spoke us into life and then spoke our names before the Father to name us as his own. Jesus has re-created us. Easter is echoed in Baptism as we are joined with Christ in his death and raised to new life with him in his resurrection.

Easter is echoing in the Lord's Supper. In the most intimate way imaginable, yet still beyond our imaginations, Jesus comes to us in, with, and under the bread and wine. He passes through the locked doors of our minds to be with us. Jesus enables us, forgives us, strengthens us, feeds us. Easter is echoed in the real presence of Christ in his Holy Supper.

By the grace of God we also echo Easter. Easter is echoed when we share the love of Christ with others, especially those who don't know him. We echo Easter when we share Christ's word of peace, which displaces fear. We echo Easter when we share Christ's word of faith. Easter is echoed every time God works faith through his powerful Word. Easter is echoed in our joy. We have great joy because we know that Jesus has reconciled us with the Father. We have great joy because we have received the forgiveness of sins in Christ. Easter is echoed in the daily joy that we have as God's children.

Easter is still echoing. Peace in place of fear. Easter echoed among the disciples, and their fear gave way to the peace that Christ brought them. Easter echoes among us in a world filled with fear, and we have peace—real and lasting peace that Jesus alone can bring us. Easter will echo in eternity where all fear will be put away and we will know peace in all of its fullness. Faith in place of doubt. Easter echoes among us, and all the things that hinder faith are destroyed by God. Easter will echo in the celebration before the throne of God when we enter into his eternal kingdom through faith in Christ. Easter echoes, and the Lord fills us with joy. Easter will echo, and we will embrace eternal joy when we enter into our heavenly home.

Peace, faith, and joy. This is Easter's echo. Thank God that through his Son, Jesus Christ, we hear Easter's echo. Pray that Easter echoes in us. Amen.

Easter 2

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