

“Forgive One Another, as I Have Forgiven You”

John 20:19-31

Christ is risen!! He is risen indeed!! Alleluia

As we continue the joyful celebration of our risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, I thought I would give poor old doubting Thomas a break this year and talk about the positive side of Christ’s first visit to the disciples after the resurrection. I find it not surprising that the first time that Jesus appears to the disciples after He rises from the dead, He says, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you...Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven.”

Christ comes to the disciples and the first thing that He starts talking about is the forgiveness of sin. That is what His entire ministry had been about. That is what His Passion, death, and resurrection had been about: the forgiveness of sin. Without the forgiveness of sins, there is no life or salvation.

And now following His death and resurrection, Jesus comes to the disciples and once again instructs them that on account of the blood shed on the cross, not only are your sins forgiven, but God has given to the Church in particular, and to His faithful believers in general, the keys to the kingdom of heaven.

The gates of heaven are unlocked and opened to the repentant children of God. And the gates of heaven remain closed to those who do

not repent of their sin or trust in God's forgiveness.

Christ has given this authority to His disciples and the Church. We learned it in Luther's Catechism as the Office of the Keys. It is such a blessing to know that when we hear the words of absolution announced, we have the sure promise that our sins have been forgiven by God Himself.

When the pastor pronounces the absolution, it is a specialized form of Gospel preaching. The absolution proclaims peace and freedom from guilt in a clear and direct way. And it is real peace and complete freedom.

God is not waiting around in heaven for me to speak before He grants peace and forgiveness to you around 5:07 on Saturday evening or around 9:07 on Sunday morning. Because of the faith of our Baptism, we live under God's grace each moment. As Luther says, "[Our] sins are already forgiven, before we confess them." Because of Christ's work, we have already been reconciled to God, and our sins have been covered.

Absolution simply applies the message of grace and forgiveness to the individual, to you, in a more formal and direct way.

On my own, I of course, have no ability or authority to pardon someone who has broken God's Law. But I have been entrusted with that authority to speak on Christ's behalf. God's grace and blessings never cease to amaze.

The One, True, Living God is a God of forgiveness. He is a God who shows unconditional love toward undeserving people who He has willingly called to be His own. We have been forgiven completely by our merciful heavenly Father, and God has said that the same should be true of the brothers and sisters in Christ. Anyone who has been forgiven by God, must certainly be forgiven by us.

Confession and absolution is such an important part of a Christian's life. The forgiveness that we announce to one another flows from the confidence of our own forgiveness. We forgive others, because God first forgave us.

That is why the Church has historically begun each worship service by confessing that we are "poor, miserable sinners deserving nothing but punishment, both here on earth and in eternity." Then after publicly confessing our sins before God, we hear those sweet words that our heavenly Father has had mercy on us and for the sake of His Son Jesus Christ has forgiven us all our sins.

When the Absolution is spoken by the pastor, it is not anything special that I do that makes the forgiveness of sins valid. The forgiveness of sins is valid, because of what we celebrated during Holy Week and what we continue to celebrate. Christ carried the guilt of all of your sins to the cross. God has forgiven you.

It is through the forgiveness of sins that God has shown His unconditional love for you. If He did not love us, He would not have offered His Son to take our place as a sacrifice. Following Christ's resurrection from the dead, He came to His followers and said, "Go and do likewise." "Love one another as I have loved you." "Forgive one another, as I have forgiven you."

For those who know that they are "poor, miserable sinners" in need of forgiveness, Christ says, "Come to Me, and I will take away whatever burden you have, in fact, I have already carried that burden for you." As Christ's ambassadors of this Good News, we have been entrusted to announce complete forgiveness to all who put their trust in what Christ has done.

When Christ died on the cross, paid for our sin, and rose from the grave on Easter morning, all of God's people no longer were held accountable for their sins. God's promise of pardon and peace was fulfilled. God intended this mercy to be extended to all people, which is why the church of the apostles has continued to send out messengers of the Good News of salvation in Christ. The message of Easter is for everyone. God's mercy is meant for everyone.

And we demonstrate our confidence in this mercy by offering God's message of pardon and peace to one another through the act of forgiving. After all, there is no one here who is perfect, who has perfect actions or perfect judgment.

God has forgiven you completely even though you did not deserve it. Share that forgiveness with one another. That person who sinned against you doesn't deserve to be forgiven. Forgive them anyway. Remember that even poor old Thomas was a forgiven child of God who did great work within Christ's Church. He carried the Gospel to India, so that even those who doubted and denied Christ could be forgiven.

No matter what doubts you have had or deeds you have done to break God's Law, the mercy of God and the message of Easter is for you. And the mercy of God and the message of Easter is for the person who has sinned against you. We live together under God's grace and blessing of the forgiveness of all our sin. Amen.

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The peace of God which surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.