

The disciples aren't doing it right. I mean, in today's Gospel text it's Easter Sunday, and just look at how the disciples are celebrating. There they are barricaded in a house, they've got the doors bolted shut. They're cowering in fear, hoping nobody will find out where they are. They're scared, disheartened and defensive, with sweaty palms and timid spirits. You have to admit, they're just not doing it right.

After all, if there's one thing you and I at Ascension know how to do, it's Easter! *Here's* how Easter goes around here: Many of our youngest members enjoy Easter baskets at home, and egg dying, and giant chocolate bunnies. Some of us come early for Easter breakfast, others of us stay late for the Easter egg hunt, and then almost all of us go out and have big Easter dinners with family and friends. If you're like me, you relax over a nice Easter brunch buffet, and have some of the best lamb you ever tasted. And, of course, let's not forget worship—we pull out all the stops: festive music and joyous Alleluias, beautiful white lilies and glorious gold vestments! Now, you have to admit, *that's* how Easter is done! So, how come the disciples don't do it right? How come they're all huddled in the corner of some dark room with a chair braced against the door?

Well, if we could rewind their last seventy-two hours and watch the footage, here's what we'd find: a betrayer's kiss; a Messiah arrested; disciples fleeing to save their own skins; Peter's denial—not just once, not just twice, but *three* times; then eventually a cross—Jesus left all alone in His hour of need. And from then on till now, things have been put on pause. So, with so much confusion, so many questions, is it any wonder we find the disciples just not knowing how to do Easter!

But y'know, we'd really learn a lot if we could listen in on their conversation. So what do you say we take a moment now and step into that locked room, and hunker down with the rest of the group? As we take our seat next to them, we can start to make out their anxious whispers. One disciple says, "Jesus was charged with blasphemy because He claimed to be the Son of God—what will the Jews do with the rest of us, His followers? Will they hand all of *us* over to the authorities too; will we also face rejection by our own people?" Then another interrupts—"And what about the Romans; just look at what they did to Jesus! Are *we* next?" All of a sudden, the image of each disciple hanging on a cross flashes through their minds.

But then we hear the beloved disciple—*ahem*—clear his throat to speak up. Now, this is hopeful. After all, last week we heard how he was the first to believe in the miracle of the resurrection. Maybe he'll be able to talk some sense into these guys. Here's what he adds to the conversation, "Remember how Jesus said, 'The Son of Man must suffer and die, and on the third day rise again?' OK, to you and me this sounds promising so far. Then he goes on, "Well, just think,"—fear now creeping into his voice—"what if we come face-to-face again with our risen Lord, the One who we—*His own disciples*—betrayed, abandoned, and denied! Remember what else Jesus said, 'Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear *him* who can destroy both soul and body in hell.'" Having finished, the beloved disciple then takes a good, long gulp—his whole body trembling now.

After listening to this group, thinking things through, maybe we, ourselves, are starting to gulp and tremble all over. I mean, are you thinking what I'm thinking? If we replayed the last seventy-two hours of *our own* lives, what would we find? Would we be a perfect example of loyalty to Jesus, the epitome of devotion to our Lord, would you and I be the very definition of faithfulness? Or if we looked up betrayal, or abandonment, or denial in the dictionary would we find our own faces in there next to each of those words?

But it's just at this moment, right when all is gloom and doom, as soon as fear has struck every heart in the room, that the risen Christ appears. And as the disciples are crawling under the tables and hiding behind the chairs, the risen Christ

speaks His first words to them. And it's not at all what we'd expect. It's not, "Why you buncha lousy, no-good, two-faced back-stabbers!" It's not, "Where were you back there when I needed you most?" It's not even, "Y'know, I was pretty upset with you, but I've managed to cool down. And I've thought of a few ways you guys can make it up to me." No, the first words out of the mouth of the risen Christ to these disloyal disciples is, "Peace be with you."

With those words, you can just see the chests heave a sigh of relief, hear the exhales, feel the room go relaxed. See, that's the true miracle of this text. Not just that Jesus is raised from the dead—as important as that is—but that He comes back not to punish but to patch things up, He comes to bring peace. In fact, three times throughout this text Jesus says, "Peace be with you"—one for each of Peter's denials, it's been said. Or think of it this way—there's peace for *every* sin. *That's* a bigger miracle than Easter even! It's one thing to die and rise, but it's a wholly other thing to forgive those that let that happen to you in the first place. Jesus rolled away the stone, sure, but even more, with those four little words, here He comes bursting through locked doors making peace.

And then after these miraculous words, the text says that Jesus shows them His hands and His side. He bears no sword or club for revenge, weapons like the ones used against Him in the garden. No, He comes in peace, the only thing that He holds is the nail hole in each palm. Each of those scars is now a reminder of the sin that He bore in those hands—the sin of the world, *their* sin. On the cross Jesus lovingly answered for those sins, paying for them dearly with His life. Now, the only thing left for those hands to bear is peace.

And just when we think He's done, the risen Christ does the unexpected yet again—not only does He make peace with them, but then He makes them *peace-makers!* He says, "As the Father has sent Me, so now I am sending you." "Go for Me," Jesus says, "in My place, on My behalf, and share with all persons the same peace, that very forgiveness, which I just shared with you." Can you imagine? Not only making peace with these disciples, but *promoting* them!—"As the Father has sent Me, so now I am sending you"? Here in this morning's Gospel Jesus performs miracle *after* miracle *after* miracle! First resurrection, and then peace, and now sending them out as peacemakers.

Y'know, the same thing goes for you and I—the miracles keep coming. Today is Sunday, after all, the Lord's Day, the first day of the week, the day of resurrection, it is as we say in the Church "A Little Easter"—in other words, it's the very same kinda day we hear about in this Gospel text. And in just a few moments Jesus will burst through our dread, our despair, our deadbolts; He will scatter our darkness and shatter our silence. In His Holy Sacrament, the risen Christ will break through space and time into this place. He will speak to you the same kinda words He spoke to the disciples, "The peace of the Lord be with you always"—it's what our liturgy calls the Pax Domini, "The Peace of the Lord." With those words of peace, He will also show you His hands and His side as His crucified and risen body and blood are held up for you to see in wafer and wine. Like Thomas, He'll invite you to stick your finger through the nail holes as you handle His true body. And like Thomas putting his hand into his Lord's side, He'll invite you to touch with your lips the very blood that flowed from that side. But that's not all—like the disciples, as you depart in peace, you will be sent out as peacemakers, sharing the forgiveness of the risen Christ everywhere with everyone. Here, now, brace yourself!—miracle *after* miracle *after* miracle is about to burst through!

A few years ago, there was this church worker's conference, where a youth leader shared a story with the group. This leader had one particular young man in his youth group who everyone at church knew was a real handful. It was said that he frequently got into it with his parents, would never listen to them or do what he was told. Well, one day, this leader recounted, this young man's dad was driving him home from sports practice when things quickly got ugly—I mean close to a knock-down-drag-out fight. The youth leader didn't remember what it was about, but he reported there was a lotta yelling from the car to the house and lots of doors slamming, that sorta thing. So off this young man goes stomping to his room, slamming the door shut and locking it tight. All the while, he sat on his bed staring out the window that faced away from the door. His mind was racing with all the possible punishments. What was it gonna be this time, he wondered. Would it be grounding; no TV for a week; having to cancel his summer beach plans with his best

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Rev. David V. Miller
Lutheran Church of the Ascension
Atlanta, GA

friend? But all the while as he was fully expecting pounding on the door and shouting from the other side, he kept waiting . . . and waiting . . . and waiting . . . *and waiting*. Nothing. Finally, he just happened to glance over his shoulder, and . . . there was his dad.

Now, this young man had no idea how this had happened, the door had been locked. There was no way his father could be standing in that room. But now that he was there, the boy just knew the axe was about to fall. . . . But it didn't. Instead, his dad reached out his open hands and said calmly these four words, "Son, I forgive you." Then he added, "Let's start over." . . . "Son, I forgive you. Let's start over." Peace was restored.

Of course, everything wasn't all roses after that, this youth leader reported. But he did notice a change in the young man; so did the parents; and others at church noticed a change too. It was then that he admitted that this story was about himself—he was that boy. And just look at where he was now! Could it be that when peace was made, that boy then became a peacemaker?

Any minute now, the risen Christ is bursting through—watch out!

"Peace be with you."