

Intro.: Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed, Alleulia! After Easter services last week, the music, the celebration, all the people and the glorious resurrection message, everything seemed perfect. But then, after another week of living out there, things may not seem so perfect after all. Let’s face it - life in this world is not easy. But Easter is not done with us yet. This week we look to Christ’s resurrection to help us with a life that isn’t always easy. In the face of so much in this world that seeks to tear down our faith, our risen Savior, Jesus Christ, comes with..

I. Power To Rebuild [It] Our Faith.

A. Look at how he rebuilt the faith of His fearful disciples in our Gospel. Even after hearing about the empty tomb and the truth of Christ’s resurrection they were still filled with fear and doubt. We heard that: **“On the evening of [Christ’s resurrection] the doors were locked where the disciples gathered for fear of the Jews”** When Jesus had been with them, these disciples were bold, courageous and certain about their faith in Him as the Christ and Son of the living God. They had experienced His power as they healed the sick and even cast out demons in His name. They were confident that if He wanted them to, they could call down fire from heaven upon their opponents.

But all that changed when they saw Jesus arrested, tortured and put to death. This was not at all what they expected, and they certainly did not want to suffer the same fate. Even after they heard about His resurrection their fears and doubts would not allow them to believe strongly about anything. They felt the best thing to do was just stay together behind locked doors and see what would happen.

B. Jesus knew the fears of His disciple, so he came to them. Suddenly, without any doors being opened, Jesus stood among them. He showed them His hands and His side because He wanted to dispel all their fears and doubts. He wanted them to be certain that their loving Savior, who died on the cross to take away their sin, was truly alive, so with His powerful presence He rebuilt their faith. They did not understand everything, but they were sure that their Lord was alive and had conquered death.

Unfortunately, Thomas was not there and even when the rest of them told him what had happened he refused to believe. They did everything they could to convince him that Jesus was alive, but he held onto his fears and doubts. He wanted, no he demanded, proof. He insisted on seeing and touching before He would believe.

What is truly amazing about all of this is how patient and loving Jesus is with Thomas. A week later he appeared again and offered Thomas all the proof he demanded. Go ahead, Thomas.. **“Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.”** With that the Lord rebuilt Thomas’ faith so that with excitement and absolute certainty he shouted out his confession, **“My Lord and my God!”**

C. Most believers have never seen Jesus the way that the disciples did, yet the Lord has given us gifts to strengthen our faith. He told Thomas, **“Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”** The greatest power of the risen Savior is shown when He builds and rebuilds faith in those who have not seen. He does it through His gifts of baptism, Word, and Holy Supper. Billions of people since the disciples and Thomas who have lived in fear and doubt because of their own sin and the difficulties of living in a sinful world have heard the Gospel and have come to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. They have never seen and yet they have believed and received life in His name.

We are among those who, because of the power of the risen Savior, have not seen and yet have believed. Yes, this world is filled with things that are hostile to our faith, but it is also filled with the miracles of nature, the miracles that are recorded in the Bible, and the miracles of lives changed by the Gospel. We have no reason to doubt or to be afraid of anything, because we know that the risen Savior, and all His saving power, is here with us. Courageously and confidently, we confess with our mouths that Jesus is Lord and believe in our hearts that God raised him from the dead to save us. [Nt. Rom.10:9]

II. Power To Bring Peace And Joy.

A. This wonderful faith in a risen and ever-present Savior is able to fill our hearts with true peace and everlasting joy. St. Paul says that, **“since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Rom. 5:1)** Did you notice that each time Jesus appeared to His disciples He said, **“Peace be with you.”**? This is not the kind of peace that the world offers, a momentary rest from conflict, but an inner peace that can exist in any circumstance. It is the peace of being made right with God through Christ. It is the peace that assures us that even when things are bad, nothing can separate us from God’s love for us. It is the peace that rests on His promise that even when things seem to go terribly wrong in our lives He will make all things work together for our good.

B. The disciples were in a bad place in their lives when Jesus came to them. As far as the things they faced things did not necessarily get any better for them after Jesus’ appearance. They would be hated, persecuted, thrown into prison,

and face death nearly every day of their lives. Yet, these trials would only serve God's greater purpose of strengthening their faith and bringing them a peace that surpasses all understanding. They came to know that God was in control and that He loved them. They trusted that the power of their risen Savior was always there to fill them with the joy of their salvation and the promise of their own resurrection to eternal life with Him.

C. The power of the risen Savior in our lives is not the removal of all the difficulties and challenges to make life easy. It is about His presence in the midst of it all. He knows the distresses we face, the difficult decisions that we have to make, the temptations and trials we endure, and He cares about us and loves us. He is there, giving us the Holy Spirit to guide us in our decisions, to teach us how to pray, to strengthen our faith, and to give us the courage to do the right thing no matter what the immediate consequences might be. He is with us to let us know that He is in control.

When a father enters the room of his frightened child in the middle of a late night storm he does not remove the storm, does he? What He does, though, is fill the room with His presence. So it is with our risen Savior. When the peace of God enters our hearts the storms of life are not always removed, but the presence of our risen Savior and His power exercised in love can take away our fears.

D. That is when real joy in living and in living forever takes over. Our Gospel says that, "*the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.*" The presence of their risen Savior and His offer of peace had taken away all of their disappointment and filled them again with a wonderful hope. They were getting a little taste of the joy that Jesus had promised could never be taken away from them.

I know that many of you have come here today/tonight with your own burdens. You have found that life is not so easy, after all. Some of you are sick or even dying. Some of you are struggling financially, facing conflicts at work or school, or having family problems. You may be struggling with some personal sin, some demoralizing shame, or some other spiritual crisis. But you do not have to give into sorrow, disappointment or despair, because the power of your risen Savior is here for you. He enters your heart by the Holy Spirit and arms you with the full armor of God. In the middle of whatever it is you are going through, He stands in the midst of it to give you the kind of joy the disciples had when they saw Him – one that can never be taken away.

III. Power To Give Purpose To Our Lives.

A. With the strengthened faith, peace, and joy, that comes to us by the power of our risen Savior we are given renewed purpose and confidence in living. If, like the disciples, the difficulties of life have gotten the best of you, and you feel like doing nothing but locking yourself away and waiting to see how things turn out, today's Gospel is for you. The power of the risen Savior is not just something that is supposed to make you feel good, it is something that can also make you do good. Christ was not raised from the dead in victory so that we can remain locked away, but so that we can go and continue His work. He doesn't bless us with His presence just so that we can wait to see what happens. He does it so that we can go in His power to make things happen.

B. Jesus said to His disciples, "*Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.*" After Christ ascended the Holy Spirit continued to rest upon the disciples to guide them into all truth and to make them into bold and courageous witnesses. Even when the whole world was against them, they knew their purpose. As the Father had sent Jesus, Jesus was sending them to proclaim God's word. By baptizing and teaching in the power of the risen Savior they would make disciples of all nations. No hiding, no waiting, but with divine purpose they went and made things happen.

C. The gift of the Holy Spirit and the calling to fulfill God's divine purpose still applies to all of us today. Our risen Savior has given us His power, the power of the Holy Spirit, to go out and make disciples of all nations by baptizing and teaching. He has called every one of you to be His priest for the purpose of declaring His praises so that others can be delivered from darkness and death into the light of salvation and everlasting life. He has called this congregation through its pastor to forgive the sins of repentant sinners and to withhold forgiveness from anyone who refuses to repent. It is not enough for us to lock ourselves away here together and say, "Well, they know where we are? Let's wait and see what happens." We are to go out in the power of the risen Savior to proclaim the forgiveness that comes through His death and resurrection. Don't let the world convince you that you are impotent and lost amid this present darkness. You are people with a divine purpose, people with divine power, people with a faith to share and wonderful peace and joy to offer.

Concl.: Listen again to Christ's words, "*Do not disbelieve, but believe*" Believe in the power of your risen Savior to help you handle anything and do what He has commissioned you to do. Believe it, because Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!" Amen.